# Wayside Violet.

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# WAYSIDE VIOLET.

BY MRS. ADNA H. LIGHTNER.

CINCINNATI, O.
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# A Wayside Violet.

## CHAPTER I.—Wise or Otherwise?

The village of Weston, a place of no particular importance, was located in Pennsylvania, near the Schuylkill river. To the west of the river, perhaps a mile and a half from the village, was a cottage, nestling down under the shade of lofty forest trees, bright and beautiful, with their wealth of mid-summer foliage. A neat, white-washed fence surrounded the cottage, and a well-worn path led from the gate to the cool, bubbling spring some distance from the house, then on through a strip of woodland to the road leading into the village.

In the path near the road were two young men standing conversing earnestly. Both were handsome and prepossessing in appearance, but very different in manner and disposition. The taller of the two was dressed in black, and a spotless white neck tie—every article of apparel proclaiming the clergy, but his blonde face lacked power of determination and decision, and his blue eyes held in their depths a shrinking, vacillating expression. He had been invested with ministerial dignity but a few months, and had just reached that point in his Christian career where he felt it a presumption to assert his clergyman-ship, and humiliating to be classed with the worldly portion of mankind.

His companion was his opposite in temperament and complexion His dark brown hair waved above a noble brow, and his dark expressive eyes, and proud, sensitive mouth, shadowed by a curling mustache, told of stability, strong determination and tenderness.

"Stop, Carl! You are rash in your expressions," said Earnest Treherne, the young minister, laying his hand reprovingly on his

companion's arm. "You certainly cannot mean all that your language signifies!"

"Rash, Earnest! Can you, a man of God, defend such conduct even in the fairest of women? Can any expression I may use in reference to her actions be called rash? Must the victim suffering under the cruel torture of the lash kiss the hand that smites him? No, a thousand times, no! May the bitterest curse of Heaven rest like a mantle of darkness upon the treacherous beauty of Louise Dupont!" Carl Leslie drew his manly form erect, and threw back his head with a haughty gesture, his pale lips quivering with excitement.

"Carl, do not invoke the curse of Heaven," Earnest said after a moment's pause, "but rather leave her punishment to Him who hath said, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay;' I admit that your disappointment is bitter in the extreme, and hard to endure, but remember that there is a balm for every wound, a ——"

"Hush, Earnest! You madden me!" cried Carl, angrily flinging aside the hand of his friend. "It is not like you to meet my distress with words like these—so comfortless, so void of sympathy!"

The cool, conciliatory manner and circumspect language of the young minister exasperated impulsive Carl Leslie beyond endurance.

"Ha, ha! You have surely forgotten that to-day I was to have been made the happiest of men," he continued bitterly, "but before the auction was over—while the auctioneer was crying going, going, twenty thousand dollars more than I possessed bought my bride. And you tell me there is a balm for such a wound? Begone with your logic! There isn't a soul upon the face of the earth so wretched as I am to-day. Every pulse of my being discords with this quiet, peaceful scene. I must get away from it all—there is forgetfulness at least in dissipation!"

"Nay, Carl. I have not forgotten; but wounded feelings will heal just the same as a physical bruise. In both cases it requires time, patience and common sense to accomplish a complete cure. You have the warmest sympathies of my heart—you know that, Carl. Be brave, be a man! I believe this to be but a Divine Providence—she was not worthy so true a man. Come, let us go on. We can reach the village in good time for a lunch before the train comes up."

Earnest linked his arm in that of Carl's, and they were about to retrace their steps to the road, when Carl bent his head suddenly to listen.

"Ah! What was that?" Some one sobbing. Let us wait a minute and see," he said.

Earnest listened a moment, then together they turned back and hurried down the path, the sobs falling still plainer upon their ears, and very soon they had traced their origin to a young girl lying prone upon the ground, by the side of a spring.

"My child, what grieves you so? Are you hurt?" asked Earnest kindly.

At the sound of his voice the girl sprang to her feet and dashed the tears from her eyes, then turned as though to flee up the path.

"Wait a moment, child, you are in sore distress it seems. Perhaps we can aid you."

Earnest's sympathies were strong, and the flushed face and streaming eyes touched a chord in his heart, and awakened a desire to assist her.

The girl, half-reluctant, turned her face toward the strangers, and for the first time since they had reached the spring Carl seemed to show some interest in the case.

It was a strangely lovely face—fair and dainty. Eyes of the darkest, deepest violet, with long, tear-wet lashes, beautifully curved lips, parted over white, even teeth, low, broad brow, and glossy braids of brown hair, escaping over the forehead, in rippling waves. No wonder Carl turned to look twice on so much loveliness.

"Yes, my child, we may be of help to you," said Carl.

"Oh, sir, I wish I was dead! Can you help me to die?"

The low thrilling tones, so full of pitiful desolation and extreme suffering, aroused Carl's impulsive, generous nature, and unconsciously he took a step nearer the girl.

"Die! You are but a child," he said,—wonder and amazement finding expression in his voice. "Surely, no poisonous blast has swept the chords of your young life. Childhood should be exempt from such cruelty. Tell us what troubles you, and if within the power of man to relieve, we will assist you."

The earnest, sweeping promise, given so readily by Carl, half startled his more prudent friend, but he gave no denial; in fact, it would not have made any difference, he would only have wasted his breath in useless words.

"You are very kind, but I fear no one can help me," said the young girl sadly. "You have both called me a child, but in one week from to-day I am to be married—forced to be the wife of one I do not love."

"Married!" exclaimed Earnest. "God forbid!"

"How old are you?" Carl asked.

"I am fifteen, sir, but I am not old enough to marry. Oh, I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than to be the wife of Rufus Day! He is cruel, contemptible and wicked! But it is no use talking. No power on earth can save me from my fate," she said, in a hopeless, distressed voice, every tone quivering with pitiful submission.

Only a great wave of sympathy and a desire to administer a portion of his religious balm, filled Earnest Treherne's mind; but all the noble tenderness of his soul leaped into the dark intense eyes of Carl Leslie.

Here was sorrow deep and relentless as his own; but, oh, how different! He had been cruelly defrauded of his bride, upon the eve of his wedding-day, while every pulsation of the young girl's heart cried out against the bonds of matrimony. Only a few moments before he had thought himself the most miserable creature in existence, but now he sees before him a lovely child bowed under a burden of despair, and in comparison, his own seems but a trifling affair. A resolution, quick formed, but strong as life itself, takes possession of his soul—a determination to help the young girl out of her dilemma, let the cost be what it may. And with Carl to resolve, was to act.

"Tell me just what your trouble is, my poor girl, and I will save you from it. Carl Leslie promises, and none have ever suffered because of his rashness," said Carl, earnestly. Then, to aid the bewildered girl, he continued:

"First, tell me your name, and where you live?"

The slender, graceful figure of the girl leaned forward a moment almost breathless, at the promise of liberty—safety from the persecutions of Rufus Day—and she raised her eyes to Carl's face with a

doubting questioning look in their depths. Had the handsome young stranger the power he professed ? Could it be possible that he could lift her out of her misery and despair ? He looked brave and self-reliant enough to accomplish almost anything, and instinctively she began to realize that he was strong enough to protect her in this her hour of need.

"My name is Dora Markley," she said. And the low, sweet voice trembled on the silence, like music from some rich-toned bird. "I live in the cottage that you can see through the trees. I do not remember my father or mother. I have always lived with my Aunt. My life has never been a pleasant one. She does not care for anything but work ; but I did not mind that—it was only her way. I would have been willing to be her servant forever, if that was all; but for the last three months, since the day I was fifteen, she has done nothing but try and force me to marry her son Rufus, and to-day she told me in words too plain to be misunderstood, that I must wed her son in one week. Oh, sir, you do not know Aunt Jane or you would not have given your promise to save me ! " Tears—hot, passionate tears—gathered afresh in the soulful eyes, as the magnitude of her sorrow reproduced itself to her tortured mind.

"The young girl is right, Carl. It is a delicate matter to interfere with such business as this," said Earnest, fearful that his impulsive friend had gone too far. "My dear girl, trust in God. He will right it in time. We are powerless. He is all-powerful."

"Earnest, I think I have read some where, that your God makes use of very weak instruments sometimes to work out His mercies, and I am just foolish enough to imagine that I have been chosen for this particular case. At any rate I have given my promise—it is too late to retract even if I desired," replied Carl. Then turning to the flushed, down-cast face of the girl, be mentally renewed his vow to save her.

"You do not love this Rufus Day, even as a cousin ?" he questioned.

"Love him ! I hate his very name more than tongue can tell."

The violet eyes grew black with disdainful contempt, the dainty lips quivered with scorn, and the small brown hands, were clenched tightly.

Carl gazed with surpise and admiration upon the excited girl for a moment, wondering at the display of determination and vehement feeling in one so young.

"I cannot doubt your assertion, child," he said emphatically, but with that quiet tone of stubborn decision his friend understood so well, "and you shall not be sacrificed."

Earnest began to grow seriously anxious, as he listened to Carl's strong language, and he touched him again upon the arm and drew him aside.

"Carl, you must listen to reason. You have no right to champion the cause of this girl against the command and desire of her relatives, it will only create trouble for you, and make matters worse for the girl. Besides in what way can you assist her? I fear that already you have raised false hopes without realizing how utterly impossible it would be for you to accomplish anything. Have you thought of any project as yet, Carl?"

"No, Earnie. I have left that part for you," replied Carl, in a coaxing tone he always assumed when he desired a particular favor from his friend. "You know that it is your chief aim in life to assist the oppressed, and comfort the distressed. Surely, you have thought of something in this pitiable case? Your compassionate heart shall plan and I will execute."

Earnest shook his head sadly, in the negative, completely at a loss for words to convince Carl of his rashness.

"Carl, you shall not inveigle me into this piece of folly. I have no plan to offer, but to point her to one who is mighty to save, and who has promised that He will not leave His children comfortless. This is not a question of feeling, but of your right to interfere in that which does not concern you. It is wrong, all wrong! Why, Carl, there is no earthly way to save the girl, except you marry her yourself—and that is impossible."

"The very thing! I knew that you would think of something," exclaimed Carl. "You have my marriage certificate in your pocket and if the girl is willing, you shall officiate at a wedding to-day in spite of woman's fickleness, and I shall be the happy man."

"For the sake of Heaven, Carl, cease your levity!" cried Earnest, startled out of his usual composure by the mistake he had made. "Matrimony is too sacred a theme to be so lightly discussed. We have had enough of this. Let us be off, or we shall miss the train."

"Not so fast, Earnie. We have plenty of time. We will speak to the girl."

Carl turned toward the wondering girl, who had stood watching, without hearing the discussion between the young men, but realizing that it in some way concerned her future weal or woe.

"My child, look into my face closely, and tell me if you can trust me fully?" he said. "If you see no guilt or dishonesty, and can have faith in a stranger, I will save you."

The girl lifted her lovely eyes and gazed into Carl's flushed face for a moment, with wildly beating heart, then with a sudden graceful motion she reached out her hand and laid it in Carl's.

"Yes, I can trust you," she said quickly and solemnly.

"Trust me enough to be my wife—now, at this moment? Think well before you speak."

"Your wife! Why! How ——"

Every pulse of the agitated girl was throbbing violently while she stood there listening, hardly comprehending Carl's proposal. The wife of this handsome young man? Then a rush of exquisite tenderness swept o'er her awakened soul—and the child was no longer desolate.

Carl noticed her bewilderment, and thought perhaps he had been too hasty.

"There seems no other way—no safety for you but this. Do you repent your trust? Do not hesitate to say no, if you think the alternative is equal to the present evil? I am going away for years. Perhaps we shall never meet again, and only in name will you be a bride. They dare not force the revolting union upon you, if you are already married. But decide as you think best."

Carl spoke without a thought of self. His life had been so recently defrauded of all its joy, that it seemed no sacrifice to protect the girl with the shelter of his empty name.

"It is not for myself I hesitate, but for you—you may regret it sometime," she said.

In that moment of extreme necessity she realized the magnitude of his generosity. He had nothing to gain by her acceptance; while to her, life itself seemed embodied in his proposal.

"No, I have counted the cost," Carl said, as he reached out his hand and again clasped hers. "I desire it above all things, and if you are ready we will proceed with the ceremony. My friend is an

ordained minister, and Fate has provided a special marriage certificate for the occasion. Come Earnest, we are waiting."

Earnest Treherne ceased his rapid walk up and down the path and halted before Carl. His face was pale as death, even his lips, and his eyes were filled with a craving, beseaching expression.

"Desist, Carl! Anything but this. I dare not make a jest or convenience of God's most holy law."

Every word and jesture of the young minister betrayed his instability and wavering will—his halting between that which he knew was virtually wrong, and an over-powering desire to favor his friend.

Carl understood him thoroughly, and acted accordingly.

"Pshaw, Earnie! Don't be prudish. Do what I ask, and leave the result with God. You ought to be thankful that you have the power to relieve this distressed young girl without wronging anyone. I desire it, and she is willing. We have no time to waste."

"Well, Carl, if you place it in that light I will not refuse longer, although I am fearful of the result," Earnest said. Then turning to the girl, he continued: "My child, are you perfectly willing to become the wife of my friend?"

"Yes, sir, if he desires it," she replied firmly.

For one moment, silence fell upon the strange trio, and sympathetic nature seemed to hold her breath in a solemn hush, as Carl Leslie and Dora Markley clasped hands. And never through all the years of his life, did Carl forget the scene, or the sweet child-form by his side.

Then out upon the air floated the words of that solemn ceremony, broken only by the earnest response of Carl, and the low, sweet assent given by Dora, but when the last words were uttered, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder," a warbler just over their heads, broke out into song, so rich, so exultant, that a smile came to Carl's lips, and an unconscious "Amen," from Earnest.

Carl produced pen and ink from his pocket, then with firm hand the new made husband signed his name to the marriage certificate, and tremblingly Dora added her own.

As the minister handed the certificate to the young wife something prompted Carl to say:

"Dora, I have given you freedom, won't you give me one kiss, just for luck?"

Dora raised her head quickly, and as Carl's gaze held her own, the truth was revealed to her that she loved this man as a girl loves but once in her life—that never again would she be heart-free, that all the devotion of her soul belonged to her husband, even though she would never see him again. Then as she remembered all he had done for her, a glow of exquisite tenderness flooded her sweet face, and with the simplicity of a child, and the shy coy grace of a woman, when she gives the first caress to the man she loves, she raised her pure crimson lips to give him the kiss he had asked for.

Carl bent his handsome head and pressed his lips to the perfect mouth, solemnly, sacredly, and with that caress he breathed a vow that he would keep unsullied from the vices of the world the man whom the child wife had blessed with a kiss.

"Dora!" came a voice, shrill, discordant and unpleasant from the cottage. "You had better make haste and bring that water. I don't propose to wait all day."

Dora started as though some hand had dealt her a rude blow, and a hunted, pitiful expression flooded her young face.

"Oh, sir, are you very sure that I am safe? She may not believe me when I tell her I am—married."

"Never fear, Dora, you have the proof. None dare deny it," said Carl assuringly.

"Dora, are you coming?"

The same rough, repulsive voice, only a trifle louder and more emphatic, rang out again on the summer air.

Dora reached out both her hands instinctively to Carl.

He grasped them in one of his, and with the other, he drew her close to his side, as with prophetic fear.

Earnest knew not what new freak of folly his impulsive friend might be guilty of, and stepping to his side, he laid a hand upon the arm of each, he said:

"Carl, you have done all that mortal can do for this dear girl. God will do the rest. Leave the case in His merciful hands."

"Yes, Dora, God will care for you," Carl said slowly, as though he questioned his own assertion, and was but repeating the language of Earnest to gain time. "Good-bye, little girl-wife, good-bye!"

Then tenderly, kindly he dropped her hands, and turned away, little thinking when and where they would meet again.

Dora lifted her bucket from the ground and filled it at the spring, then with one last loving look after the handsome stranger, who had given her freedom from a fate worse than death, she turned and walked slowly up the path, her brain so bewildered, that but for the folded paper nestling in the drapery of her dress, over her throbbing heart, she would have declared it all a dream. She the wife of a perfect stranger? But a half-hour before a child, now an awakened woman, and a bride.

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### CHAPTER II.—A Stormy Interview.

A tall, thin figure stood in the open door of the cottage, a frown of displeasure on her repulsive face, and her steel-gray eyes flashing angrily.

"So you have come at last, have you?" came from between the thin resolute lips, as the graceful form of the girl made its appearance.

"Yes, Aunt Jane," replied the girl, and she entered the tidy kitchen and lifted the bucket of water to the table.

"What kept you so long, you lazy piece? I have half a notion to shake the breath out of your worthless body. Dreaming as usual! I think before the month is over you will have something else to do —you are no account now."

Dora understood the allusion, but she did not fear her power now. Yet there was something indescribably touching in her low, musical voice, and tender downcast face.

"Oh, Aunt Jane, please don't call me such names! It isn't often I keep you waiting," she said passionately. Then a thought, that had been forming itself for several weeks, forced its way to her trembling lips, and half-desperate, half-startled at her own bravery, she added:

"Are you my Aunt? Something tells me that you are not."

A blow, quick and heavy, was her answer, and as she staggered to her feet, she was met with hot, stinging words.

"Am I your Aunt? Who else do you think I am? This is gratitude for taking care of you so many years. You poor, miserable brat! It is no credit to me that I am your Aunt, but rather, an honor to you, that you have one decent relative. Who do you think you are anyhow? Some Princess in disguise?"

"I do not know who I am, Aunt Jane, but I firmly believe that you know far more than you have told me. If I am only Dora Markley, your despised niece, what object can you possibly have for desiring your only son to marry me? I have no wealth to bring him—not even love, for I hate and detest him."

"You do, eh! Well, what does that matter? I shall marry you all the same."

A short, burly form darkened the door, and a coarse, insulting voice interrupted the low, thrilling tones of Dora. In an instant the delicate, shrinking form of the girl grew erect, the velvety eyes shone like stars, the small hands clinched themselves resolutely, and the beautiful head was thrown back haughtily.

"Rufus Day, you shall never marry me!" she said, in clear, ringing tones, then she added with a thrill of tenderness in every word, as she remembered from whom she was quoting, "God will take care of me."

"I have no objection to that part of the programme," Rufus Day replied sneeringly; "but if there isn't a remarkable change in you, He will need some assistance, and as your attentive, loving husband, I can aid Him very much. Dora you had better submit quietly, for in one week from to-day you shall be my wife, and all the power of Heaven and hell shall not take you from me!"

Dora's lips curled in pardonable derision, when she thought of a power on earth potent enough to protect her from this man—and she possessed that power, a gift from the king among men—and there was a shadow of triumph in her voice as she said:

"Never, Rufus Day! I would die first! You dare not do this wicked act. I say again, if I am only a poor orphan girl, why do you wish to force this unpleasant marriage upon me? I repeat for your benefit, Rufus, that I do not believe your mother is my Aunt, or that you are my cousin."

Had one of his old work-horses taken the fence at a leap, Rufus could not have been more surprised, but his sluggish brain was slow to act, and he could only look from his mother to the lovely, determined girl, with a startled, cringing glance.

"Mother, you havn't been blabbing have you?" he said at last, regardless of his mother's look of warning.

"What do you mean, Rufus? There is nothing to tell," replied Mrs. Day, with downcast eyes, not daring to meet Dora's searching glance. "The girl seems possessed to-day."

"Yes there is mother, and I don't care if she knows it," said Rufus, sullenly. "She is just as good as my wife, and I don't care if I do tell her that I am not her cousin. Maybe that is one reason why she does not want to marry me—some folks think it isn't the proper thing for cousins to marry."

"Hush, Rufus! How dare you tell such a falsehood. She is your cousin," said Mrs. Day, her face scarlet with anger.

Dora's face gleamed with a great joy, her eyes fairly sparkled with excitement, and with a sudden graceful impulse she sprang to the side of Rufus, and grasped his arm tightly.

"Oh, Rufus!" she cried, "repeat those glorious words again. Is it indeed true that I am not your cousin?"

Rufus entirely misconstrued Dora's actions and eager words. He believed she had been backward in accepting his love simply because he was her cousin, and that his revelation had removed her prejudice, and elated beyond the expression of words, he attempted to take her hand, while he said:

"Yes, Dora, it is true. I knew that was all that was the matter with you. Mother, don't you see. It makes all the difference in the world?"

"Aunt Jane, who am I? You must know."

Dora's lips parted breathlessly, and her eyes grew dark with expectation.

Mrs. Day shrugged her shoulders suggestively and looked savagely at Rufus a moment before speaking.

"Dora, I had intended never to tell you anything of yourself, but Rufus has said too much for me to still claim relationship. Talk about a woman not being able to keep a secret! Pooh! A man, if he is in love, has no more sense than a goose. He is ready to tell all he knows and a great deal more."

"Yes, but Aunt Jane, whose child am I?" interrupted the eager girl.

"Well, that is more than I know. If you must be told, to satisfy your curiosity, I might as well do it, first as last. Twelve years ago a gentleman and lady with a little girl of three years, came to Weston to spend the summer. The lady was sick all the time, and when the leaves began to turn she died. I nursed her while she was at death's door, and after she was dead, the gentleman wanted me to take the child and bring it up as my niece. He promised

that he would never take her from me, and he has faithfully kept his word. You are that child, and I have never seen or heard of your father from that day to this, and got precious little good out of you to repay me for all my trouble."

"Was my name Dora Markley?"

"No, it was not. They called you some outlandish name, but I did not like it, so I changed it to Dora Markley—the Markleys are in our family, and a proper set of people they are."

"And this is all you know?" said Dora, in a disappointed tone. "Wasn't there any thing left with me to explain who I am? No writing, or anything?"

"No, Dora, nothing," replied Mrs. Day, without raising her eyes to Dora's face.

"Why, mother, there is something in that little red box."

"Hush, Rufus, I say there is not," and Mrs. Day's eyes began to flash angrily.

"Never mind, Dora. After we are married we will see about that," said Rufus, and he made a move as if to grasp her hand.

"Rufus, we can never marry," Dora said in clear, ringing tones.

"Why, Dora. I thought that was all right, now that you know that you are not my cousin. Why can't we marry? What is to hinder?"

"Only this Rufus. I am already married."

"What!" exclaimed both mother and son, in the same breath.

"You married!" continued Mrs. Day. "You cannot play that on me. This is ill timed foolery."

"Aunt Jane, as truly as you and I live, I was married to-day, down by the spring."

"Stop, traitor, I will crush you where you stand! It is false. You cannot prove it."

"Yes, I can prove it. I have the marriage certificate—can you ask for further proof?" Dora's lips trembled a trifle, but her voice was still thrilling with triumph.

"Show it if you dare. Seeing is believing," retorted Mrs. Day.

"Stand back, Aunt Jane, and you shall see," replied Dora, stepping back and unfolding the paper to their view, so that they might plainly read the printed words from their position.

Mrs. Day devoured the important paper with her keen gray eyes, until satisfied that Dora's words were true, then with a spring like

an enraged tigress, she reached the side of the girl, but not soon enough. Dora had anticipated something like this, and was prepared, and had already replaced the paper in the folds of her dress, beyond the reach of the destroying touch of Mrs. Day.

"Give it to me, Dora, or I will make you sorry for this day's work! You are not of age. The marriage is not legal."

"That is so, Dora! It is not legal without mother's consent," interrupted Rufus. "I don't care one penny for that piece of paper —I shall marry you all the same. What is the name of your adorable bit of perfection?"

"It does not matter to you, Rufus. You dare not force me to marry you while he lives."

"Dora, give me that paper, or go to your room at once," said Mrs. Day.

"I will go to my room," said Dora, firmly, as she turned to leave.

"That is right, mother. Lock her in until she comes to her senses, and if she is very long about it, I will marry her, fool that she is."

"Then there will be two of you," said Mrs. Day, sarcastically, "for I never saw anyone make such a fool of himself as you have done."

"Say, we, mother. I guess you told by far the most," retorted Rufus.

Dora, disgusted with the scene, hastened up to her room, in the attic, and soon she heard the key turn in the lock of her door, and she knew that she was a prisoner until she would consent to give up her marriage certificate; and that she would never do, let come what would. She could not be wholly cast down after all she had heard—after being assured, that she was no relation to the mother and son whom she so intensely despised. That was sunshine enough to dispel the darkest cloud. On one point her mind was fully determined, and that was that she must flee, knowing how desperate they both were when made angry, she dared not trust herself within their reach. Oh, if she only knew the name of her father, or even her own name! What had Rufus said about this little red box? Something within it might explain. She remembered to have seen it often in Mrs. Day's room, and now believing it to belong to her she determined to possess it—but how? God will direct me, she thought. Although she had

never been taught anything of theology, yet, since Carl had said, "God will care for you," her faith had grown wonderfully strong in an unseen power—an overruling Spirit.

Once Mrs. Day came to her door and asked for the certificate, and when Dora declined to give it up she re-locked the door, promising to take it by force in the morning.

This hastened the girl's decision, and she began to arranged to leave at once the home of her childhood. She gave no thought to her escape from the room. She knew full well that it would be no trouble at all to reach the roof from her window, and from thence to the ground; but where should she go, and what should she do, were questions of the greatest importance.

The hours dragged wearily along until the shades of night wrapped the cottage in its mantle of darkness, and then Dora began to prepare in earnest for her flight. She had not dared to arrange her satchel before, for fear of detection, but now she filled it with some necessary articles, and then sat down to wait until mother and son were asleep, before venturing from her room.

She counted the strokes of the old-fashioned time-piece down stairs as it rang out eight, nine, and at last ten o'clock, and as the last stroke thrilled the silence, she realized that the hour had come to act—that the next sixty minutes would lighten her heart with its song of freedom, or burden her soul with alarming defeat.

She glanced around her little room with no feeling of regret that she was leaving it—perhaps forever. There was no sacred keepsakes to lay aside with regretful, loving touch, no tender memories to crush out from her young heart as she turned away. Her life had been only an existence—not the remembrance of a caress, or a kind word to counsel her to stay; without a shadow of wavering she stepped out upon the roof, and in a very few moments she had reached the ground. She halted a moment under Mrs. Day's window, and as she did so, voices fell on her ear, startling her with the knowledge that her enemies were still awake, and plotting against her liberty.

"Rufus," Mrs. Day was saying, "we have made a bad muddle of this business, but if we play our hand well we shall yet come off victorious. I have placed the box in the bottom of the old chest out in the wood-house for a few days, until she is safely ours. She will never think of looking there, but you may depend on it she will ransack

the house. I will get the marriage certificate in the morning and destroy it, then we will know who her lover is. My, but she is a sly one! I thought that I had watched her too closely for any young man to even look at her—much less, court and marry her right under my nose."

Dora could scarcely repress a smile while she listened and thought how meager her courtship had been, and how little Carl Leslie had filled the rolê of lover. Then a great seriousness flooded her soul, and she wondered what irresistible power had caused her to love him with all her might, mind and strength, in defiance of the fact that he did not love her.

Fate, after frowning upon her all her young life, seemed at last to pity her defrauded childhood, and shower into her heart one favor at least—even the knowledge of the whereabouts of the coveted box. Without waiting to hear more, Dora stole into the wood-house and lifting the heavy lid of the chest, she plunged her hand to the bottom, and a wild thrill of joy quivered through and through her being, as her fingers came in contact with the box. She lifted it out and clasping it close to her heart, she passed swiftly out and down the path, never halting until she reached the spring. Then for a moment she stood recalling the one eventful hour of her life, asking herself why Carl Leslie had done so much for her, and why he looked so unhappy, not seeming to care what the future might present, either for good or evil. Then a thrill of exquisite joy mastered her curiosity as she reveled in the thought that she was his bride—that with the trembling, half-whispered assent she had given, without reserve, all the wealth of her girl-heart, and in all the future to come she should only love him more and more.

She continued on down the path until it joined the road to the village, then, for the first time she paused, undecided where to go, but as is always the case with the young, she resolved to go on to the city, believing that something would present itself in which she might make enough to keep her from want. She remembered that a train to the city was nearly due, and quickening her steps the depot was soon reached. She possessed very little money—only a few dollars, saved from the sale of berries—but it was enough to defray expenses to her destination; beyond that she did not plan.

Having a little time at the depot she opened the precious box with trembling touch, anxiously hoping, yet fearing everything. She

found two packages of letters—one from her father, the other from her mother, but proving nothing beyond what Mrs. Day had told her. Her mother's letters were all post-marked "Rose Cottage, New York," and signed, "Violet;" while her father's bore the foreign stamp of "Oxford, England," and only the name of "Raymond." Then she noticed another folded paper, of more recent date, requesting Mrs. Day to call their child Violet, and to give her the letters when she was old enough to understand, but nothing to tell the eager, disappointed girl who or what she was.

Nothing transpired to interfere with her taking the train and it was with a sigh of relief that she sank down into a comfortable seat in the crowded car and began to look around her.

A stately, handsome lady of perhaps forty years, sat directly in front of her, and because of her nearness attracted her attention most of all. She had a dainty, winsome child of four or five years with her, whose childish prattle seemed to annoy her to a considerable degree. At last, with a gesture of dismay, she said:

"Oh, Edith, *do* be quiet! My head will burst."

The little creature drew down the corners of her rose-bud mouth and looked very serious.

"Why, grandma, I can't keep quiet!" she said earnestly. "I just try and try, but the more I try the more I want to talk. Let Edith kiss your head. Mamma used to say that one of my kisses always made her well. Oh, grandma, I want mamma! My own, own mamma!"

"Don't Edith!" the lady replied, tears welling up in her dark eyes. "Mamma has gone, but grandma will love her darling."

Dora dearly loved children, and was deeply interested in the sweet child. Soon the thought suggested itself that she might relieve the lady, and at the same time entertain herself, and leaning forward she said pleasantly, "Edith, won't you come and sit with me? I will gladly talk to you until grandma's head is better."

At the sound of the low, musical voice, both lady and child turned around and gazed into Dora's flushed face.

The eager, child-voice was first to break the silence.

"Grandma, *do* let me go! I almost know that I cannot be quiet, and your head will never get well. Besides, this poor girl is so lonesome, and wants me to cheer her up."

"Indeed, I am," replied Dora. "I would like very much to have you come."

"If the young girl wishes it, you may sit with her," said the lady wearily. "Only do not be troublesome."

Quick to avail herself of the desired consent, the child sprang down from the seat, and out into the isle to the one Dora occupied, while the lady, much relieved, arranged her shawls, and sought to take a few moments needed rest.

The child nestled down by Dora's side and looked eagerly up into her face.

"What is your name, Miss?" she asked.

A half-startled gleam leaped into Dora's eyes, and her fingers fluttered nervously with the ribbon at her throat. How should she answer the child? Was her name Dora Markley, Violet Markley, or Mrs. Carl Leslie? The crimson glow deepened her dimpled cheeks, a tender, love-light changed the expression in her eyes and her lips parted in a smile of delight. No, she would not claim the name Carl had bestowed upon her, until, of his own free will—because he loved her even as she loved him—he would call her his wife. Her father had given her the name of Violet, and the same had been her mother's, surely she had a right to assume it now.

"Say, Miss, what is your name?" repeated the impatient child.

"Violet Markley," she said. "Now, what is all of Edith's name?"

"Oh, yes. You don't know, do you? It is Edith Lynne Vancouver. Now, isn't that the grandest name you ever heard? Grandma lives across the ocean, and we are going there. Mamma is gone, they laid her in a box all covered with flowers, and took her away until she gets well. Papa he is somewhere, but grandma says, 'goodness knows where.' Nurse Mary always took care of me, but when grandma wanted her to go with us, she said no, that it made her sick to ride on the water. I wonder why? Wouldn't you like to go over to England?"

"Indeed, I should, Edith," replied Violet, and she recalled the post mark of her father's letters, and because of that England would always be dear to her heart. "But to cross the ocean is beyond my wildest fancy—I never even dreamed of such a thing."

Edith drew her child-form erect, with all the pride and grace of a duchess, bestowing a trifling favor, and said, emphatically:

"Of course not. You did not know Edith Lynne Vancouver, was the reason. Now, I am going to take you with me, just to let

you see the country. My, but it is a large place! Lots larger than New York City. But you have not asked your mamma. Where is she, Violet?"

"Mamma is dead! I have no one to ask—no one to care whether I go or stay," said Violet, bitterly.

Edith caressed Violet's hand tenderly, and tears of sympathy moistened her long, silky lashes.

"Well, never mind. I am dreadful sorry. But it makes it all the easier to go if you have not got any one to ask permission of. Where was you going, Violet?"

"I am going to the city, Edith."

"What for?" still questioned the eager, inquisitive child.

"I am going to find something to do. I have no one to take care of me, and I must work."

Violet's voice was low and sweet, but every tone, hopeless and dejected.

Edith's grandma had caught several words of Violet and Edith's conversation, and now she raised her head, and turned to Violet, with an eager expression on her face.

"Child, did you say that you was on your way to the city to seek employment?" she questioned.

"Yes, madam."

"You have no father or mother—none to care for you?"

"No one in the wide world to care for me. I am all alone."

The lady gazed into Violet's pure, delicate face a moment, then said:

"Would you like to cross the ocean? Would you object to accompanying me, as Edith's companion?"

"Oh, yes, madam! If I could be of use to you," quickly replied Violet, her eyes glowing and sparkling like stars.

"There, Violet, didn't I tell you that you should go," interrupted Edith.

"How old are you, child?" the lady continued.

"Fifteen, madam," Violet replied, smiles dimpling her face, at the lady's mistake in calling her a child.

Edith noticed the smile, and said:

"Grandma, do not say child, her name is Violet Markley; and Violet, grandma's is Mrs. Lynne."

"Very well, Edith. Violet, you may consider yourself engaged to watch over the little mischief, and can take charge of her at once. We will arrange other matters in the future."

Mrs. Lynne turned away with the air of one who had gotten rid of a disagreeable subject; while Violet could hardly believe it possible that such good fortune had befallen her. Of all things in the world a trip across the ocean was her greatest desire, and then it promised safety from Mrs. Day and Rufus.

After awhile, when Edith's prattling tongue was still, and her dainty head had nestled down in Violet's arms for a nap, the tired, bewildered girl gave herself up to the torrents of thought that swept the chords of her girl-heart. Would she ever see Carl Leslie again? He had said that he was going far away, and that only in name would she ever be his wife. Where was he going? Why would he never return? Then another thought brought a low, sweet laugh from her lips. What a commotion there would be in the little cottage in the morning. How Rufus would storm, and Aunt Jane scold. Her revery continued until the blue-veined lids closed over the dusk eyes, the long, silken lashes rested on the pink-tinted cheeks, the scarlet lips parted in a dream-smile, and Violet kept Edith company in her innocent slumber.

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## CHAPTER III.—Out on the Ocean.

Violet, with her new friends, remained a few days in New York, and during their stay in the city Mrs. Lynne provided a suitable outfit for her, becoming the position of companion to her grandchild, after which they took passage on board the Lady Gay for England, as Mrs. Lynne, Miss Edith Lynne Vancouver, and Companion.

To Violet, whose life had been passed in the little village of Weston, the change was a heaven of delight, and when the steamer began to move out her heart bounded like that of a bird set free—she was safe.

Mrs. Lynne had grown very fond of the fair young girl, and little Edith already idolized her. There was a certain air of refinement and delicacy about her, which despite her training and associations, clung to her like a garment of purity. Every motion and gesture was graceful and easy, and her speech pure and proper, as though she had been "to the manor born."

Mrs. Lynne had questioned her concerning her young life, and Violet had told her all of her history, but that she was a bride—that was a secret too sacred to reveal to any one—it even flooded her face with crimson to whisper it to herself.

They had been out almost a week, and while Mrs. Lynne and Edith had been prostrated with sea-sickness, Violet had declared war against its tyranny, and was victorious. Every moment she had spent attending to the many wants of her companions, endearing herself more and more to their hearts, and now both were able to come on deck, and with their convalescence her attentions ceased to some extent, enabling her to take some note of her fellow-passengers. One old gentleman in particular, seemed to meet her every time she left her stateroom, and his pleasant greeting always caused her heart to quicken its pulsation, and her smile and blush had become very dear to him, although he could not have defined his feelings beyond an interest every voyager feels toward his companions while they were so closely associated together. He began his acquaintance with her by asking after her charge, and now that her time was not so fully occupied be would often engage her in conversation; and soon Edith claimed him as her special friend, thus throwing them still more in each other's company.

Mrs. Lynne did not trouble herself about Edith and Violet so long as they were seemingly in such good society; for the gentleman from appearances must have reached his three-score years. His hair and beard were gray, and his step feeble, but his smile was rougish and his eyes held a merry sparkle, while his mind was stored with a whole battery of pleasant stories, which Edith had full benefit of. Once, after the child had dropped asleep in his arms, he had asked Violet of her father and mother, and she had answered:

"Mother is dead. I do not know whether father lives or not."

And then, as a wave of sadness softened every line and curve of her lovely, delicate face, he did not question her further, beyond asking what he should call her. He had spoken to her as "child" and to Edith as "darling" always before.

"My name is Violet," she said.

And he had repeated it over with a strange thrill of tenderness in his voice, and then had been silent a long time afterwards.

One morning, when Violet had gone to the Captain on some errand for Mrs. Lynne, he detained her a moment, and said pleasantly:

"Miss Violet, we are a good deal nearer England than America this morning. How does that suit you?"

Violet did not lift her eyes in glad surprise, as he had expected. He did not know that it mattered little to the friendless girl where her lot was cast.

"I don't know, sir," she replied thoughtfully. "I love the ocean, and I do not know what England will be like. I would be very well pleased to stay forever on board the Lady Gay—the trip so far has been very pleasant."

"Thank you, child. The Lady Gay should consider herself complimented. I believe you would make good a sailor. Old Nep did not get the better of you at least, but if I mistake not he will have a chance at you yet, in the shape of a storm, before night. How would you relish that?"

"A storm at sea! Oh, that would be grand!" then a look of terror darkened her expressive eyes, as she added with a perceptible shudder, "but what if the Lady Gay should go down with all on board?"

"Miss Violet, did you not know that there is no 'if' in the make-up of the Lady Gay?" the Captain replied, with a glance of pride over his beautiful steamer. "You are as safe on her deck as though your feet were already pressing English soil."

Only partially re assured Violet turned away, and all the morning her thoughts continued to dwell on the probability of a storm, and the possibility of their destruction, until it grew to be a certainty with her. And once, as she halted by the side of her gray-haired friend, she said abruptly:

"Did you know that we were going to have a storm, and maybe all be lost?"

"No, Violet," he replied. "Do you know so?"

"Yes, sir, the Captain told me this morning; and, somehow I feel like something dreadful was going to happen."

The old gentleman laid his hand on Violet's bowed head, in a tender caress, and his eyes shone with ready sympathy for her evident distress.

"Never fear, child. God will take care of you," he said cheerfully.

Violet lifted her head quickly. What power of consolation those words possessed for her. Carl had said the same. Yes, come what might, God would watch over her, because solemnly, tenderly she had been given into His keeping, and He had promised to be a strong wall of protection to the least of His little ones.

"Thank you, sir," she said naively, and he knew that in some way he had cheered her, but he did not guess at the truth of it.

As the afternoon wore on, she noticed a look of anxiety on the faces of captain and sailors, which she perhaps would have passed by without a thought, but for her conversation with the Captain in the morning. Now they were forbodings most appalling to her. The impression of calamity so fastened itself upon her mind that she began to make preparation for it. She took the precious letters of her father and mother, and her marriage certificate and wrapped them carefully in oil silk, then secured them in the pocket of her dress.

At last, just as the sun was dipping itself into the dancing waves, the Captain's voice was heard on deck, saying:

"Make ready for a rough night, boys—it is coming, sure."

Violet, like one in a dream, made Mrs. Lynne comfortable for the evening, then taking little Edith in her arms, she sat down in the cabin to wait for a something that she was powerless to define. Never had the winsome fairy seemed so dear to her as now, or her quaint, sweet expressions so bright and witty, but after a while the dainty, curly head drooped over on her shoulder, the eyes closed wearily, and Edith was in the land of child-dreams; but Violet did not lay her down, she still clasped her close to her heart.

Once the Captain passed her on his way through the cabin, and stopped a moment to look into the face of the slumbering child, and Violet ventured to question in her low, intense voice:

"Sir, do you think the storm will be heavy? I did not see even one little cloud."

"True, child, but it is in the air. There will be clouds enough before morning. Yes, we shall have a heavy wind-storm, without a doubt. Do not undress, Violet, and if you are brave enough, you shall see what it is like."

"You are very kind, sir. I shall not undress to-night, and if—but you said there is no 'if' in connection with the Lady Gay."

The Captain did not reply, the young girl's earnest persistency in a presentiment of coming evil, had its effect on him, and he shook his head and passed on.

After some time she began to feel the vessel roll gently too and fro, then lunge forward on a heavy wave, only to sink back into the cradle of the sea, and what she had been waiting for so long had come—the storm had struck the Lady Gay. She sat and listened eagerly to the hoarse commands of the Captain, and the hearty "aye, aye," of the sailors, but realizing all the time that each wave was lifting them higher than the preceding one, and like a thing of life the staunch vessel was battling with the elements as though, with a knowledge of her precious freight, and how much depended on her strength. The commands grew more hurried as the storm reached the height of its fury, and the responses less hearty, then the order rang out:

"All hands, on deck!"

All the terror of a life-time seemed condensed into that one awful moment to the trembling girl, and the accumulation of despair was reached, when the maddening cry of "fire, fire!" thrilled through and through the doomed vessel.

Doors were flung open, and half-dressed men and women appeared on every side, and all was the most pitiful confusion, fear paralizing the very souls of the awakened ones. Dense volumes of smoke issued from the hold of the vessel, and with one accord every one rushed for the deck, eager to get as far as possible from the fire.

Violet made no effort to move. She seemed completely bewildered, until the cries of Edith aroused her, and she staggered to her feet and looked around her, only to find that she was alone with the child in the cabin, and more for the sake of her charge than for self she pressed the child closer to her breast, and sought the deck.

The life-boats had been lowered and were rapidly filling—some reaching them in safety, others missing their footing, in their haste were caught up on the foam-crested waves and lost.

As Violet reached the deck the Captain espied her and grasping her arm sought to lift her over the vessel's side, but Mrs. Lynne was still on board, and she drew back, begging her to go first. Then, as she realized that there was only room for one more, she

kissed the sweet face of Edith and gave her into the hands of those waiting to receive her, and saw her placed in the arms of Mrs. Lynne, believing that she must stay and go down with the burning vessel, but even while she resigned herself to fate she saw that another boat was being lowered, and in a moment she had been handed down to ready hands, followed by her old friend. Then the sailors, and last the noble Captain left the deserted deck, and sadly and mournfully the order was given to "pull away."

They hasten to obey the command, for the Lady Gay was already wrapped in flames, and in less than a quarter of an hour, the blackened hull of the once beautiful vessel, went down into the grave of old ocean, and was no more.

Violet found herself seated near the old gentleman who had interested her so deeply, and a thrill of joy came to her heart at the thought that she was not altogether friendless, not alone, and with a feeling of security she moved closer to him. He reached out his hand and drew her head to his knee and soon the weary girl was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

The night of terror spent itself, and a dull gray morning heralded the approach of another day. Violet awoke startled and bewildered, then her situation dawned upon her, and with a shudder she buried her face in her hands.

"Don't worry, Violet," said the gentleman, drawing her head to his breast. "We will soon be picked up by some passing vessel."

"Oh, sir, I was not thinking of that? If Mrs. Lynne and Edith are lost where shall I go? What shall I do? I have no one to turn to. I am all alone!"

The strong arms of the old man pressed the desolate girl close to his heart with a hungry, heart-famished expression in his eyes.

"No, Violet, never all alone again, so long as Robert Lincoln lives!" he said earnestly. "I will care for you. From this moment you belong to me. I had a little girl once, but she died. You shall take her place in my lonely heart—you shall be my Violet, my Heart's-ease."

"Oh, I thank you so much, Mr. Lincoln!" Violet replied, "and if I never see little Edith and Mrs. Lynne again, I will gladly stay with you, until I can find another situation—if we are saved."

"That is right, child," and Mr. Lincoln caressed the little hand resting in his, with a kind, fatherly touch. Then to distract her mind from her own distress, he continued:

"Now, Violet, look carefully around and see if you can find any trace of the other boats? My old eyes are too deceiving to trust them."

Violet rose to her feet, and steadying herself by placing her hands upon Mr. Lincoln's shoulders, she gazed long and eagerly out upon the vast expanse of water, but nothing that resembled a boat greeted her vision.

The Captain stepped to her side, and handing her his glass, said:

"Try this, Violet, it will aid you very much."

She placed the powerful lens to her eyes and looked again, and was rewarded for her perseverence by seeing a little boat, quite a distance from them, wholly at the mercy of the waves, going farther every moment from them, and with a longing, shuddering sigh she recognized the crimson dress of little Edith, gleaming against the dark background.

"What is it, Violet? Do you see anything? questioned Mr. Lincoln.

"Oh, yes, I see a boat, and in it little Edith," she replied sadly. "Their oars are gone, and they are drifting away from us."

"Give me the glass, child!" the Captain said hastily.

And after gazing a moment through it, he shook his head, and drew a deep and regretful sigh.

"They are lost!" he said, "they are drifting out of the course of steamers, and only an accidental vessel will fall in with them. It is far better, Violet, that you took your chances with us. We have water and provision for three days, and I believe that we shall be overhauled long before that is exhausted—at least, I sincerely hope so."

Violet looked earnestly, pityingly up into the Captain's face for a moment, then a sentence of consolation, that she had tested, came to her remembrance, flooding her soul with its presence, and lending a soft, rosy glow to her fair face.

"Yes, Captain, you can do more than hope," she said, in thrilling, resolute tones. "You can trust in God—He will take care of us."

"True, child, I stand justly rebuked," the Captain said, with a blush of shame. "We are in the hands of God, and because of the one faithful soul with us, we shall all be saved."

"Amen!" came in faltering accents from the trembling lips of Mr. Lincoln, and tenderly, caressingly, he drew the girl down to his side.

The long weary day merged into night, and night into another day, and still no sight of a sail, but Violet never grew discouraged. She cheered the tired sailors, lightened the heart of the distressed Captain, with her bright, comforting words, but most of all, she clung to her friend, Mr. Lincoln, with tender, loving confidence. And when the evening of the third day drew nigh, without relief, while starvation presented its ghastly form to madden them, every soul in the little boat would have laid down his life willingly for their Heart's-ease, as they all called Violet. But the sacrifice was not demanded of them, for as night settled around them, they espied a light off to the eastward, and in a moment they had hoisted their lantern to a piece of broken mast, and began to pull with a will for the vessel.

Those on board the vessel soon descried their little light, and stayed their course until the boat came long-side, and all were taken on deck and kindly cared for. Then, after cruising around some time in search of the other boats, but without success, they continued on their way.

After landing safely in Liverpool, Mr. Lincoln began to consider seriously what he should do with Violet. His home was in New York City, and he had just started on a tour of three years in the east. At last he decided to talk with her on the subject, hoping that she might suggest something, and one evening he entered their parlor for that purpose; but Violet anticipated his words, and saved him the embarrassment he had so much dreaded.

"Mr. Lincoln, I am glad that you have come at his moment, for I have been thinking all the evening that I have burdened you long enough with my presence. You have been kindness itself, but I must find something to do. Even if you desired it, I could not sit here and fold my hands in idleness," Violet said earnestly.

"Well, Heart's-ease, I was just going to mention that same matter to you. I have a proposition to make, and if you do not like it I want you to say so. I want to travel about three years, and if you do not object, I would like my little girl to spend that time in some good school, and be ready when we return to New York to take charge of my home, an accomplished, polished young lady. What do you say?"

"Oh, Mr. Lincoln, what you offer would be heaven itself to me! But it must not be. I have no claim on you. I cannot accept so much from the hand of one who is almost a stranger."

"You do not understand, Violet. I have neither wife or child—you are defrauding no one, if you accept. I am a lonely, old man, craving the care and companionship of one whom I have grown to love as my own daughter. I have more wealth than I know what to do with, and it would be a kindness if you will help me to spend some of it."

Violet came close to his side, and laid her hand upon his arm, then gazing searchingly up into his face—

"My very soul craves the opportunity you so generously offer, for I am but a poor, ignorant girl," she said, with deep emotion, "and if you truly desire it, I will gladly, oh, so gladly, accept your kindness, and will try to employ the three years in such a manner as to bring no discredit upon your choice."

"You could not do that, even now, little Heart's-ease. But for your own sake—you would feel the difference. I want you to attend closely to your studies. You are to write to me and acquaint me with your progress, and at the expiration of three years, I shall come and take you home. I have but one request to make—do not give your heart away while at school."

Violet's lovely face flushed hotly, and her eyes drooped quickly, and for one moment she was going to tell him all about her hasty marriage. That already her heart had gone from her keeping, even if she never would see the possessor again. But then, she could not tell her love—the love that was born of the most sacred moment of her life—the love that Carl Leslie would smile at, if he should know—but she could promise that which he seemed so much to desire, and lifting her dainty head proudly, she said:

"Mr. Lincoln, I promise solemnly to hold myself aloof from all gentlemen society until you return, and faithfully devote every moment to my advancement. This is a trifling request in return for all you are doing for me."

"It is enough, Violet—it is all I ask. You belong to me now, and no breath of sorrow or distress shall ever come to darken your life."

He had forgotten that,

> "Who breathes must suffer, and who thinks must mourn,
> And he alone is blessed who ne'er was born!"

## CHAPTER IV.—Violet Lincoln.

Three years of restful enjoyment, through the historical East, have passed, and Robert Lincoln, looking only a trifle older, stands before the rarest vision of loveliness his eyes ever rested upon, and wonders if it can possibly be the child of his adoption—his Heart's-ease. He remembered that there had been promise of great beauty in the sweet face, and graceful, dignified form of the young girl, but he was wholly unprepared for this lovely, matured blossom before him.

He clasped both hands out-stretched toward him, and feasted his eyes on the pure blushing face, with a thrill of exquisite rapture, that she was to be near him in all the years to come.

"Violet, you have grown so beautiful that I almost doubt your identity with the little girl I left three years' ago," he said at last. "Do you know that although I have been permitted to look upon the far-famed beauties of Florence, Rome, and Athens, yet in all my wanderings, 'A form more fair, a face more sweet, ne'er hath it been my lot to meet,' than my own Heart's-ease. My shy, modest Violet, under the genial rays of the sunshine, has most wonderfully expanded into richness of tint, beauty of symmetry, and perfection of culture."

A happy glow of joy over-spread Violet's face, at the words of Mr. Lincoln—joy that God had given her that which so much pleased her benefactor—not a feeling of gratified vanity, because she had been called beautiful.

"Be careful, Mr. Lincoln, or even at your age, you may be called a flatterer," replied Violet archly. "But I am more than glad if I please you."

"Please me, Violet! You startle and bewilder me, and I long to be home that I may become accustomed to your sweet presence. Shall we start at once?"

"Yes, Mr. Lincoln, I am ready at any time, and very anxious to see my new home; but I dread the trip across. I shall never like the ocean again, it took my darling Edith from me, and gave her up to the cruel waves."

Violet's head drooped, and the splendor of her dusk eyes was veiled by their fringed lids, as the thrilling remembrance flooded her soul.

"And did it give you nothing in return, Violet?" Mr. Lincoln said, in low, tender tones.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lincoln! Forgive me! Old Ocean gave me the dearest friend a desolate girl ever possessed. Do not think me ungrateful!"

And with a pretty, impulsive motion, she grasped his hand in both of her's and pressed it to her lips.

"Nay, child, do not even speak to me of gratitude again—you owe me none. I shall be the recipient of favor because of your companionship. The Comet sails day after to-morrow, and she is a good vessel. Do you think you can be ready so soon?"

"Certainly, Mr. Lincoln, and sooner if you desire," Violet replied quickly.

Very well, the time I have named is soon enough. But Violet, there is something else I wish to speak of. I do not like the formality of Mr. Lincoln, and now that you are to become part of my life, I very much desire that you would accept my name. If you do not object, from this moment you shall be Violet Lincoln, and I shall be Uncle Robert to you. What does my Heart's-ease say?"

Glad tears flooded Violet's eyes, and an expression of great joy surged over her lovely face.

"Oh, yes, Uncle Robert! I have called you so all these years to myself, but I dared not speak the name aloud," she said, in sweet confusion. "I gladly accept the name of Violet Lincoln, and with that gift I accept the future, so full of promise, and leave with the discarded name of Markley the desolate memories of my childhood."

Mr. Lincoln bowed his head over the fair young girl, and left a kiss of adoption on her brow, then with a low "thank you, child," he passed from the room, leaving Violet standing lost in bewildering revery, forming a picture beautiful enough to madden an artist.

True to her promise, she had not formed the acquaintance of any gentleman, during her three years' stay at school. Every moment had been spent with a view of making herself worthy the acknowledgment of Carl Leslie, and through that striving a talent had been developed that she did not dream she possessed. Her music-teacher had early estimated the value of her voice, and had bent every energy to its cultivation, with the happiest result. And

Violet's heart bounded with pardonable pride as she realized that if need be, her voice might become a fortune to her.

The hour for her departure from her pleasant school associations was at hand, and many a young girl clung with tender embrace around Violet's neck, reluctant to give her up, because she was a favorite with all—a fact Mr. Lincoln noted with pride—and when they turned away, there was an added thrill of affection in his voice on account of it.

When they arrived on board the vessel, all was bustle and hurry. Mr. Lincoln had secured pleasant state-rooms for Violet and himself, but neither tarried in them long, but hastened on deck to watch the receding shore.

They were standing gazing off shore-ward, when a voice fell on Violet's ear which sent every drop of blood in her veins rushing like a torrent to her wildly palpitating heart, and turning quickly she met the dark eyes of Carl Leslie—her husband. She withdrew her gaze instantly, a vivid flush leaping to her cheeks, but not without realizing that it had been returned with interest. She did not fear that he would recognize her—dress, culture and years, had made such a thing impossible; but she would have known him anywhere in the world. He possessed the same handsome face, dark expressive eyes, and tender, resolute lips, that were so indellibly stamped on her heart.

And Carl Leslie—what did he think of the fair girl whose glance met his so blushingly? Did he associate her with the little girl to whom he had given the shelter of his name, and had kissed goodbye at the spring? No, not even in the faintest degree. He only recognized in Violet Lincoln the fairest girl in all the world, and his heart thrilled as it never had done before, because of the knowledge that he would be near her for some time.

In all his wanderings he had never forgotten the hour when Dora Markley had trustingly laid her small brown hand in his, and faltered out the assent which had bound them together as husband and wife until death should part them; and her kiss, so pure, had remained on his lips, unsullied by the touch of another. He sometimes thought of Louise, but only with a feeling of indifference; because, after the first wave of indignation had subsided, he knew that it had been but an acknowledgment of her fascinations—not a love that lives forever—that had filled his heart.

Somehow Carl could not prevent his eyes from seeking the blushing face of Violet, and after a while, when Mr. Lincoln carelessly turned his face toward him, his heart leaped with joy, as he recognized in him, one whom he had met while traveling in the East, and had assisted very materially in an adventure, which might have proven disastrous, but for him.

Mr. Lincoln started perceptibly as his eyes rested upon Carl's eager, flushed face, and with a pleasant smile, he stepped forward and grasped his hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Leslie!" he said, heartily. "Glad that you are to be a fellow-passenger on board the Comet. You proved yourself very handy and willing when last we met, and I shall not regret that you will be conveniently near in case of an emergency."

"Thank you, Mr. Lincoln. I would gladly be of service to you, although I trust there will be no occasion, on our trip to New York."

"True, true! The last time that I was at the mercy of Old Ocean, she used me shabbily, I must confess. She ought to do better this time, if only to show that she could behave herself. Eh, Heart's-ease, what do you think?"

Violet turned blushing toward them, as she was addressed, and Mr. Lincoln, with his hand still resting in Carl's, said:

"Mr. Leslie, allow me to introduce Miss Violet Lincoln."

Carl lifted his hat with courtly grace in appreciation of the honor, while Violet flushed hotly, and sent him a glance from her violet eyes that tingled and thrilled his inmost being, as she acknowledged the introduction.

"Miss Lincoln my friend has intimated that your trip to England was a stormy one," Carl said. "I hope your return may be more pleasant."

"Thanks, Mr. Leslie. It was an experience that I have no desire to repeat—even the remembrance makes me shudder, after three years."

"I should say so! Why, Mr. Leslie, it would have caused a piece of statuary to shudder. You remember, no doubt, of reading about the burning of the Lady Gay? Well, we were barely saved from going down with her."

"Indeed, I do," replied Carl, deeply interested. "And you were on board?"

"Yes. I believe Violet and I were all the passengers who were saved. We took our chances with captain and crew, and were picked up after three days in a life boat."

"Ah, yes. I remember that you told me something of your shipwreck at the time we met in the pass of the Simplon," said Carl.

"By the way, Violet, I never related how near I came to losing my life in that same famous pass, did I?" Mr. Lincoln asked, turning to Violet.

"No, Uncle Robert, but it is not too late—won't you tell me now? I know Mr. Leslie would enjoy the recital of an adventure."

Mr. Lincoln burst into a merry laugh, and looked at Carl, who stood shaking his head at him, the rich crimson tinging his cheeks and brow.

"I guess Mr. Leslie could tell you about the little affair much better than I could, Violet; but for fear he will not give 'honor to whom honor is due,' I will relate it myself. While in Switzerland, I joined a party of sight-seekers on their way to Italy. After we had entered the renowned pass of the Simplon, a wild, desolate place, where rocks tower hundreds of feet on either side, or displayed precipices that seem interminable in their depths, in my awe and wonder I fell behind the party, and in some unaccountable manner lost my footing, and was over the rugged side before I was aware of my danger. Bruised and bewildered, I lay on a ledge of rock, some ten feet from the top, utterly unable to save myself. Mr. Leslie belonged to the company, and his true, honest heart missed me, and alone he turned back to seek one who was a perfect stranger to him. His search was rewarded, and with his strong arm and a rope I was raised to a place of safety. Think you, Violet, that I owe him anything in the way of gratitude?"

Tears sprang unbidden to Violet's eyes, while she listened. Her darling, her love, had done all this! She gave both little trembling hands to Carl, and looked up into his face, a tender love-glow flooding her own, and said:

"Mr. Leslie, I thank you more than words can express for saving the life of one who is very dear to me—but, more than all, I thank God that he has crowned your life with noble, true manhood. I would have been desolate indeed without Uncle Robert."

Carl could not speak, he could only clasp the little hands still closer, glad that through service to Mr. Lincoln he had unconsciously given comfort and joy to this fair girl.

And thus the three so strangely met fell into a pleasant conversation which lasted some time, and when Violet signified her desire to leave the deck, it was Carl Leslie's strong arm that assisted her below, and his tender, admiring glance that caused the crimson glow to leap to cheek and brow, as he left her at the door of her state-room.

After that the days passed like a dream of delight to Carl and Violet, while Mr. Lincoln in enjoying their happiness, seemed to fail entirely to see where they were drifting.

Violet soon found that no thought of her identity had entered the mind of Carl, and she was determined never to betray their relationship until she had won his love; and sometimes when he could not hide that love, she would inconsistently sigh for his lack of honor for his forgetfulness of his bride. She did not consider that she was lavishing all the wealth of her girl-heart upon him, and that he could no more help loving her than a tiny boat could pull against the current of the Niagara. But it was different with her, she realized her right to love him with all her soul—was he not her husband, could any one claim more of her heart-worship? And her soul declared, none but God.

Ah, little did Violet understand the turbulent state of Carl's feelings! He knew now that never before had his heart responded to the touch of the God of Love. And while he would have given his life for the love of Violet, he was truly, fatally bound to Dora Markley; but he was not brave enough to shun her presence—even when he knew that it was wrong. How could he be discreet when every glance of her dusk eyes bid him tarry by her side? And wholly regardless of the result he gave himself up to the bewildering delight of her society, every day growing less strong to resist the torrent of his love, and do that which he knew was right.

The last evening on board the vessel, as they were slowly promenading the deck, in the silvery moonlight, Carl drew his lovely companion closer to his side, and said in low, thrilling tones:

"Violet, do you know that I wish we might sail on forever in the Comet, just as we are now. My whole being rebels against the separation of to-morrow!"

The velvety eyes were uplifted in startled dismay, and the sweet face paled and flushed in the moonlight.

"Why, Carl, we shall see each other often—we shall both stay in New York! What do you mean by a separation?" she questioned eagerly.

"Yes, Violet, I trust I shall see you often; but I can never have you all mine again, as I claim you now. I had not intended to say in words what every action and glance have repeated over and over; but, Violet, darling, I love you—I love you! Yes, every pulsation of my heart breathes your name, although it is dishonorable in me to declare it. I have no right, forgive me, I have no right!"

Carl bowed his head in bitter anguish, while all the pride in Violet's heart flooded her dusk eyes with its glow, because he had been true to his honor—because he had acknowledged the claim of the trusting young girl-wife, even while his very soul cried out against the decree.

Carl felt her form quiver, and her heart throb wildly against his arm, and with a glad accent tendering and thrilling every word, he said:

"Violet, forgive me, but you do not hate me, because I was not strong enough to do right? I could not seal my lips against the confession I have made. You have my heart, with all its first, maddening, absorbing love; but, oh, darling, I cannot offer you my hand—it belongs to another."

Violet stopped him abruptly in their promenade, and looked up into his face, her own radiant as the first blush of morning, her violet eyes gleaming like stars, and her lips parted breathlessly,

"Carl, you are the truest, noblest man in all the world—and I love you!" she said, her voice ringing out in clear, resolute confession and pride, because of the object of that love. "I shall claim the affection of your heart, and perhaps sometime you may be free to place your hand with it."

If it had not been for the knowledge Violet possessed, she could not have so bravely confessed her love, and suggested a possible future for them; but even now, although he was ignorant of the fact, she belonged wholly, completely, to him.

"Don't, darling! You know not how you tempt me," Carl said, his voice hoarse and agitated, and he drew her close to his side;

"but let the worst come, nothing can take from me the comfort of the knowledge that you love me."

Carl bent his head to press a kiss upon the crimson lips, so temptingly near, but the remembrance of a caress he had received from his trusting girl-bride, caused him to change his intentions, and, instead, he touched his lips to her brown hair in tender reverence.

They talked long and earnestly that last precious evening they were to enjoy together, as arm in arm they walked the deck of the Comet; always as lovers, but with the barrier of a pair of little brown girl-hands between them.

Some strange freak prompted Violet to delay the disclosure of her identity for a few days; and unconsciously, through her decision, she gave satan an opportunity to work out great misery and crushing sorrow for both.

Once when Carl had said hopefully:

"Violet, I feel, I believe, that it is not wrong for me to love you so deeply, that somehow, God will make it all right in His own good time." Violet remembered that the same expression of half-doubt and desire to believe, surged over his face, as when he said to her, "God will care for you."

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## CHAPTER V.—Violet in Her New Home.

It was in the gray of early morning when the Comet swung around and settled like a great white bird at the landing in the city of New York, but it was almost nine o'clock before Violet, Mr. Lincoln and Carl stepped across the plank and rested their feet upon American soil.

A handsome carriage was in waiting for Mr. Lincoln, and with an audible sign of regret, Carl handed Violet to a seat, then lifted his hat and stood aside as they dashed away.

Violet had expected to find her new home one of wealth and luxury, but when they drew up before a magnificent building and passed inside she was wholly unprepared for the oriental splendor which greeted her on every side.

Mr. Lincoln enjoyed her amazement and delight for a moment, then turning to a stately, middle-aged woman, who had just made her appearance, he said:

"Violet, this is my worthy house-keeper; Mrs. Burnett, Miss Violet Lincoln, the future mistress of my home."

Violet greeted Mrs. Burnett pleasantly, her heart going out in interest and affection to the motherly woman who bent her eyes in kindly curiosity upon the fair, queenly girl before her, then she followed her to the elegant rooms which had been prepared for her. She sank into an easy chair, and laying her head back against its velvet softness, she gave herself up to thought. Ought she to remain in this beautiful home to which she had no right? She had spoken so often of earning her own way in the world, and it seemed to distress Mr. Lincoln so much, that she had let the subject drop; but now, as she realized the extent of all the favor he would lavish upon her, her inmost soul was overwhelmed with a sense of his regal generosity. He was too magnanimous—she dared not accept it at the hands of one whom she had no claim upon. As she continued to dwell upon the imposition on his kindness, she sprang to her feet, and with the impulses of a child she hastened down stairs and into the elegant apartment in which she had left Mr. Lincoln, determined to force him to listen and be reasonable with her.

She found him standing before a portrait of a rarely beautiful girl, his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes raised to the face above him, in yearning, pitiful tenderness.

She stole silently to his side, and laid her hand upon his arm, before he was aware of her presence, then as he turned and beheld her shy, sweet face, such a look of joy overspread his own as to almost startle her.

"What does my Heart's-ease want?" he questioned, while he stroked her brown hair with a tender, caressing touch.

She bent her head a moment in resignation to her resolve, then the words came from her lips passionately, earnestly, but oh, so reluctantly.

"Uncle Robert, I have come to tell you that I cannot accept the shelter of your home—it is all so grand, so magnificent—I must not stay here. I have no claim—no right to this regal home. I am a child of poverty, unfit, but for your liberality, to even dwell here as a servant."

"Don't, child!" he said, his own voice choked with sobs. "I know that you would not willingly grieve the heart of an old desolate man, but every word you utter stabs me like a cruel knife. What I offer you is but dross—but chaff—while I ask

you for the pure gold of your young life—for the sacrifice of yourself to the companionship of a childish old man. My Heavenly Father gave you to me, and you are as sacred to me as the memory of my lost Violet up there. Heart's-ease, I have given you her place in my heart, and her chair at my fireside. You will not deprive me of my comforter—you will not leave me alone?"

Violet reached out her hands and placed them in those of her kind old friend, wave after wave of crimson, betokening her exquisite rapture, staining cheek and brow, and gladness shining from her soulful eyes.

"I accept your lost Violet's place in your true, honest heart and in your home, thankfully, gratefully, promising never to mention the subject again without your permission," she said, her voice trembling with emotion. "And your daughter's name was Violet, Uncle Robert? that accounts for your being attracted toward me. How beautiful she was!"

And Violet lifted her eyes again to the lovely blonde face above her.

"Yes, Violet, your name caught my fancy, then your sweet, winning ways won the old man's affection, until to-day you are the bright sun of my day, the one star of my night, and I claim you all my own pure Heart's-ease. I have regretted many times, that in some way you do not resemble the one whose place you fill, but you are her opposite in every respect, but sunny disposition and merry, winsome manner. Violet, my child sadly repaid all my love and care—she left home and married some scapegrace. I have never learned his name, and I never saw my pride and joy again. I was hasty, I know, but she was all I had left in the world to love. God grant that you may not do likewise! Now, if you are satisfied to be my little comforter, and not bother any more about impossibilities, I think that you had better return to your room, and lay aside your hat, and stay awhile," said Mr. Lincoln, playfully, as with blushing delight Violet turned to leave the room.

The first week passed as a whirl of busy shopping, and becoming accustomed to her elegant surroundings; but with all, she did not forget Carl, her lover—Carl, her husband. Every pulsation of her true young heart was loyal to him, and his name mingled pleasantly with every thought.

One evening as she sat at the grand piano, touching the keys lightly, bringing out low, soft strains of music, Mr. Lincoln entered the room and crossed to her side, and laying his hands upon her shoulders, he drew her head back against him, and looked down laughingly into her fair face.

"How would my shy Violet like to attend the first grand party of the season?" he questioned. "The invitations are out and we have been favored."

A half startled expression crept into Violet's eyes.

"Oh, Uncle Robert, I cannot go! I never attended a party in all my life. I would not know how to act."

"Nonsense, child! Just act yourself and nothing could be more perfect. You could not be awkward if you was to try. It is too late now, I have accepted for you. Besides, I have a fancy to show my little Heart's-ease to the elite of New York society. You need not fear for the result. Of course, now that music is all the rage, you will be expected to play some. How I wish that you could sing."

"Why, Uncle Robert, you never asked me to sing! I did not know that you cared for vocal music."

"Oh, yes, there is nothing so gladdens my heart as the sweet influence of song. Can you sing?"

"Yes, a little," she said. Then a rougish light crept into her eyes, and she added very demurely, "after the party I will sing for you. It will take all of my time to prepare something nice to play, if there is a probability of my being requested to make a display of myself."

Violet's lips parted in smiling consciousness, and her eyes sparkled as she thought of the surprise she had in store for Mr. Lincoln. She knew that he did not dream of the power of her voice, and a desire formed itself in her mind, that if an opportunity presented at the party, to give him a pleasure that he did not anticipate.

"I shall be a stranger to all, Uncle Robert. I have no doubt my enjoyment will be great," said Violet, as she drew down the corners of her dainty mouth ironically. "You need not expect to leave my side even for a moment, just to punish you for daring to accept an invitation without consulting me."

"That would be no penalty at all, Violet, but an honor," he said, as his hand lingered caressingly on her brown hair, "but if I secure a five minute's uninterrupted chat with you, I shall do much better than I expect. You seem to have forgotten that young Leslie will be there. He is the lion of New York society at present, and he is not likely to forget my little girl so soon, I imagine. Strange that so fine looking a young man has not married ere this."

Violet could not repress just the least bit of a silvery laugh as she thought what a disturbance she might produce by a confession—but the time was not yet, and with a shadow of mischief still lurking in her dark eyes, she replied gravely:

"It is strange, Uncle Robert. I expect that he has never met his affinity as yet. I shall be very glad to meet him again. He made my trip across the ocean quite pleasant."

"I would say so, Violet!" and a merry twinkle came to his eyes as he spoke, "and he seemed to find some little pleasure in trying to entertain my Heart's-ease. I am surprised that he has not called."

Violet did not wonder at his absence, for well she knew that he was striving to cast aside all the responsibility and claim of the ceremony performed in the woodland by the spring, and his absence only told her that he had not succeeded. And at times she found it very difficult to decide whether she desired most that he should love Violet Lincoln with all the power of his soul, or be true to poor little Dora Markley.

"Perhaps he is renewing old acquaintances, Uncle Robert," said Violet, musingly. "You know that he has been absent from his home three years."

"Of course, I did not think of that. We will excuse him on that ground, eh, Violet? If gossip tells the truth there was a certain young lady of New York who caused his sudden departure and prolonged stay. You see, Violet, it was told me since my return—such things are always resurrected the first opportunity. He was engaged to marry Louise Dupont, a very handsome French girl, and every arrangement consummated, when she found that she could secure an old man with an immense fortune; and, just like the confounded French, she threw him over at the last moment, and he left the country. She married the old man, and

within the year he died, leaving her mistress of his vast fortune. Society thinks that she will catch Carl yet, but I believe the boy is too wise to play with fire the second time."

Violet listened breathlessly to Mr. Lincoln's recital, in which many things that she had failed to understand were made plain. She realized now why Carl was so ready to marry the poor, distressed girl, and how he came to have the marriage certificate so convenient. He had recklessly flung away his freedom, because every aim in life had been crushed—every desire trampled upon by a heartless woman. And he had loved that one—he would meet her again. Perhaps the sight of his first love would fan the slumbering flame into new life, and she would be forgotten. How glad she was that she had not confessed her relationship to him; but oh, what a sad, doubting pain had crept into her heart within the last few moments, shadowing the sun of her day, bringing darkness into the joy of her existence. And the sad refrain repeated itself over and over to her tortured soul, that he did not belong to her, although in the security of her love she had claimed him all her own.

Mr. Lincoln noticed how still Violet was, and how pale her sweet face had become, and he said playfully:

"But, Heart's-ease, if you like him, all the French widows in Christendom won't make any difference. He could not help loving you, and you have the advantage of a two week's sail with him."

The shadow of pain in the dark eyes deepened a trifle, her voice trembled a little, but her words were brave and resolute:

"Indeed, Uncle Robert, because we were thrown together as fellow-passengers it does not follow that either have indulged an interest beyond that which the circumstances permitted. You know on board a vessel formalities are absurd, and we feel a freedom that would be unpardonable anywhere else."

"Yes, yes, child! I was only teasing you. I know that you are fancy free, and I trust that you will remain so for many years to come."

But even while he spoke he thought proudly, that no society belle could have parried the thrust better, and come what might she would not wear her heart upon the sleeve.

## CHAPTER VI.—Violet's Triumph.

The days passed very pleasantly to Violet, in her beautiful home, every wish seemed to be anticipated by Mr. Lincoln, and every possible favor lavished upon her. Mrs. Burnett, the worthy house-keeper, almost worshipped the fair young girl, who had come like a ray of sunlight into her quiet life, and Violet found her helpful in many ways beyond that which her position warranted. She had seen much of fashionable life, and possessed taste and refinement, and Violet soon learned to go to her for advice in many things pertaining to her present position, that she would have been sadly at a loss without.

It was with a feeling of feverish unrest that she awaited the ordeal of her first party. As a rule, young girls look forward to their first appearance in society as the crowning joy of their life, but a dread and timidity so intermingled with her prospective delight as to almost overshadow it as the hour drew near. Could she bear the meeting with Carl, and perhaps be forced to witness his return of allegiance to the love that had almost wrecked his life? Would he prove false to his girl-wife and his vows to Violet Lincoln? And even while her heart declared, no, never! her doubting lips faltered perhaps; and so she lingered in the torments of indecision.

When the last touch had been given her exquisite toilet, Mrs. Burnett stepped back from her side a little, to view the gloriously beautiful girl.

"You will be the loveliest lady at the party, Miss Violet," she said, rapturously.

"Don't flatter me, Mrs. Burnett. You know I expect the truth from you and Uncle Robert," Violet replied, while a softer light came into her eyes, and a rare smile played about her rosy lips.

"I have given you the truth, Miss Violet, and then the half has not been told. Mr. Lincoln is waiting. You are ready, are you not?"

"Yes, all ready, I believe. Come, Mrs. Burnett, we will hear Uncle Robert's opinion."

And the half-timid, half-eager girl, and stately house-keeper passed out and down the stairway, followed by the delighted maid bearing her dainty wrappings. As they entered the parlor, Mr.

Lincoln turned and gazed a moment upon Violet as she halted before him.

"My beautiful Violet!" he said joyfully. "Is it possible that flesh and blood can be so perfect?"

"There, Miss Violet, are you convinced?" exclaimed Mrs. Burnett, triumphantly.

"Oh, yes, beyond controversy!" laughingly replied Violet. "You are both determined to spoil me with flattery, but I am so glad, Uncle Robert, if I please you to-night."

And even while she spoke, she was thinking far more of what Carl's judgment would be, than anything else, and wondering if she would suffer by the contrast with the fair young widow.

Very carefully Mr. Lincoln wrapped the slender form in the fur-lined white satin cloak, and entered the carriage. They were soon at the residence of Orlando Travis, the leader of New York society.

They were late, as Mr. Lincoln intended they should be; and as Violet entered the long, lofty parlor on the arm of her escort every eye was turned upon her, and every voice hushed in eager admiration of the royal young beauty, so modest, yet so self-possessed.

Mr. Lincoln gave one doubtful glance down at the fair face by his side, for he realized that the ordeal was more trying than he had expected, but his old eyes sparkled with pride, and he gave her arm a reassuring little pressure as he noted her dignified, graceful bearing, and entire freedom from embarrassment.

But under all her outward composure, Violet's heart was throbbing like that of some frightened bird. At first she saw only a sea of curious faces uplifted to hers, and cold criticising eyes passing judgment upon her, but soon she became accustomed to her surroundings and she began to individualize and wonder. Introductions followed her presentation to host and hostess, until the name of Mrs. Willett caused the color to leave her face, and a startled expression to come into her eyes, as she looked eagerly into the lovely face of the one who had unconsciously brought dismay and doubt into her heart, and as she continued to look she was obliged to acknowledge that she was wondrous fair. Then a voice, low and tender, but deep with powerful feeling, brought the ready blush to cheek and brow, and Carl

Leslie was by her side, clasping her hand and eagerly expressing his delight at their meeting.

Mr. Lincoln, at Carl's request, gave her up to him, and proudly he led her away, and the neglected old man realized the fulfillment of his prediction in being utterly unable to reach her side because of the admiring throng surrounding her. Later in the evening he saw Carl seat her at the piano, and he pressed his way as near as possible to witness how she would acquit herself.

She played several difficult selections which were received with favor, then there was great fear took possession of Mr. Lincoln's heart as he heard quite a number expressing a desire for a song. She would surely fail, he thought, if she attempted to comply with the request, but regret was useless — Carl had placed the music before her and she was going to sing. The first notes were low and sweet, as those of some startled warbler, then the desire of her heart gave confidence to her voice, and wave after wave of glorious melody filled the room. Every sound was instantly hushed. Never had they listened to anything like it before. Mr. Lincoln lifted his head a moment in amazement, then a flood of feeling mastered him, and tears of emotion sprang to his eyes as his very soul reveled in the clear, rich tones of his Heart's-ease.

For one moment after the song had ceased an impressive silence lingered, then a buzz of admiration followed, accompanied with eager demands for another song, but Violet's triumph had been complete, and the expression in Carl's eyes, and Mr. Lincoln's glad smile, were approval enough, as she rose from the piano.

Louise Willett looked upon the fair young stranger as one would gaze upon a beautiful painting, with a momentary feeling of admiration for her perfection, then turned aside indifferently; but soon the humiliating knowledge was forced upon her that her belle-ship was being severely tested by the advent of the fresh young beauty, and an added pang was given her heart, as Carl Leslie lingered by her side seemingly oblivious to all other presence. Louise did not love Carl, but his adoration and attention in the past had flattered her vanity not a little, and the thought had suggested itself that she might possibly regain her former power over him—and the thought was not unpleasant to her—but as the evening wore on she realized her mistake, he

was beyond the power of her fascinations. Who was the fair young girl with the wonderful voice? Where had Carl met her? All conjectures were vague and unsatisfactory, only one fact was established beyond question, and that was, the certainty that Violet's entree into society had been a triumph and a phenomenal success.

How proud Mr. Lincoln and Carl were of her reception; but, oh, how miserable Carl was! He realized with the keenest sense of self-reproach that he had no right to remain by her side, to drink in the rapture of her glances—to return them with all the worship of his soul, shining from his expressive eyes. How bitter the thought that in one moment of impulsive folly he had made it impossible for him to possess this rare, winsome girl—the guiding star of his existence. He remembered, almost with anger, that his friend Earnest Treherne had said that he would regret his rash marriage, and that even in a like expression, the distressed girl had displayed a wisdom greater than his own, while he had laughed in scorn at the possibility of such a thing. Ever since their arrival in New York he had persistently resisted the desire to seek Violet, and forget everything in the sunshine of her smiles, and because of the inborn honor and integrity of his noble soul, he had been enabled to gain the mastery; but now, with her love-lit eyes looking into his, her voice so low and sweet, thrilling every chord of his heart, it was different—oh, so dangerously, so temptingly at variance with his determination—and for the time, regardless of future remorse, he reveled in the wealth of her love, and the complete yielding to the torrent of his own.

After a while some one claimed Violet's attention, and Mr. Lincoln, thinking that Carl had monopolized her long enough, led her away.

Carl turned and glanced carelessly over the room—all were alike to him now that Violet had left his side—and with a start of recognition he encountered the reproachful glance of Louise Willett's dark eyes. How beautiful she was, he thought; and then he remembered that he had not spoken to her since his return. Perhaps she imagined that he dared not trust himself in her presence; he decided to show her, as well as others, that his heart was

proof against all her fascinations, and crossing the room he sought her side.

Louise Willett grew radiant as she watched his coming, and when he had reached her side, she held out her jeweled hand, her fair face wreathed with bewitching smiles.

"I am pleased to meet you again, Mr. Leslie," she said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Willett," he replied, as he took her hand. "It is a delightful privilege to meet old friends and hear such expressions of welcome from them."

And thus they drifted together again, after three years of separation, both ignoring the past, Carl careless and indifferent, Louise buoyant with enlivened hope.

After conversing pleasantly for awhile she expressed herself uncomfortable from the heat of the room, and Carl offered her his arm and they sought the conservatory, followed by many expressive nods and smiles from those who had known and remembered their relationship of the past.

Violet had also observed Carl seek the side of Louise, and as he passed from the room with her upon his arm, life itself seemed to leave her for a moment, but the pride of her pure soul came to her rescue, and her smile was quite as bewildering, her voice low and clear, as though her heart was not thobbing and quivering with the wildest dismay.

She had intended to tell Carl something of his girl-wife very soon; but now she could not do so. She did not know that he had never loved Louise; she reasoned, that if he had once loved the beautiful young widow when a girl, it would be impossible to resist her charms now, and if such should be the case, she must be silent and as one dead. He had given her liberty and all her present enjoyment, and never would she become a barrier to his happiness, although her own heart lay crushed and mangled at his feet. All these thoughts were floating through her mind, even while her lips curved with rougish smiles, and her tongue gave back rare flashes of wit and wisdom. While she had been talking she had noticed a tall dignified gentleman enter the room, and from his reception she concluded that he was a tardy arrival. Soon she became aware of the fact that his eyes were rivited upon her face, in seeming open admiration, and she changed her position a trifle to avoid the annoyance

it caused her; but he was not to be disposed of so easily. He crossed the room, and stepping up to Mr. Lincoln's side, said:

"Glad to see you, Mr. Lincoln! Your trip seems to have improved your health wonderfully."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Vancouver, I am enjoying most remarkable good health—in fact I do not feel a day past forty. Just arrived, did you? You have not met my little girl? Allow me."

He touched Violet's arm gently and drew her to his side.

"Mr. Vancouver, Miss Lincoln," And they were chatting pleasantly together.

Violet found him strangely interesting, while he acknowledged to himself that if he had known the rare attraction he would not have been so late.

Carl returned as soon as he could courteously leave the side of Mrs. Willett, only to find Violet seemingly absorbed in conversation with a handsome, dignified gentlemen, and the gentlemen utterly oblivious to all around him except the sparkling, vivacious face before him.

Carl pulled at his mustache savagely and wished him at the bottom of the Red Sea; but then he decided that it was useless to get into a passion, and deeply chagrined, he turned to Mr. Lincoln and engaged him in conversation.

Violet, the wicked little mischief, comprehended Carl's feelings, and enjoyed his discomfeiture. She was determined to reward him for his chat with the young widow, and she lavished her smiles on Mr. Vancouver, regardless of the havoc she was making with his heart. After awhile, when she thought she had punished him sufficiently, she glanced around at him, and said carelessly:

"Mr. Leslie, do you know that I do not consider you very much of a prophet. You said that I would not like New York society, because of its reserve and lack of sociability, I am perfectly delighted with it, in spite of my prejudice."

"I doubt not that you are well pleased, Miss Lincoln, but all are not awarded the flattering reception which you have received tonight," replied Carl, turning toward Violet.

She noticed that Carl seemed unacquainted with Mr. Vancouver, and after introducing them, she said:

"Indeed, Mr. Leslie! Well, I feel very grateful if I have been especially favored. This evening shall ever be remembered as one of the most delightful of my life."

"May I not hope that I shall be remembered also, Miss Lincoln?" said Mr. Vancouver, eagerly.

Violet glancing from Carl's dejected countenance, to Mr. Vancouver's flushed, expectant face, the spirit of retalliation still predominating,

"Certainly, Mr. Vancouver," she said archly, "forming your acquaintance has added very much to my enjoyment."

"And I?" questioned Carl.

"Oh, I have known you so long that I shall not remember you at all in connection with this evening."

Carl's handsome face clouded, and an expression of pain came over his dark eyes at Violet's indifferent words, but the sight of his distress caused her honest heart to relent, and she added with a thrill of tenderness in every tone:

"I reserve a special place in my heart for old friends, and they shall never be crowded out for the new, however pleasant they may be. Why, no one in all the world could usurp Uncle Robert's place in my affections!"

"Thanks, Heart's-ease! It is no use, gentlemen, I have the first claim, and I shall be terribly tyranical if I find any one trying to infringe on my rights."

"I am glad you have raised the danger-signal, Mr. Lincoln," said Carl, half in earnest, and also not a little amused. "I see that you have partaken of the spirit of the time—you believe in monopoly regardless of its destructive results to others. I sincerely trust that you will not convert Miss Violet to your dangerous heresy."

"Your counsel came too late, Mr. Leslie. You should have expressed yourself sooner," replied Violet, gleams of mischief sparkling from her eyes.

Although Carl did not appropriate very much comfort from Violet's words, yet he was satisfied with the tender glance from her eye and the love cadence of her voice, and grew wonderfully buoyant.

Mr. Lincoln perceived that Violet was becoming somewhat wearied, and signified his intention of taking their leave. Mr. Vancouver, looking his regret, bid them good-night and turned away,

not daring to ask permission to call, and Mr. Lincoln did not extend an invitation.

Carl met them at the foot of the stairway, and offering Violet his arm led her to the carriage, every pulse thrilling with joy because of the nearness of his darling—his pure Violet. He bid her a tender adieu, promising to call very soon, then stood watching the carriage until it was lost to view. He could not return to the parlors after Violet had gone, so he walked away thinking of her, and 'how near and yet how far' she was from belonging wholly to him. As he continued to dwell upon the utter impossibility of his claiming her, a thought suggested itself to him, which was new and startling. Perhaps Dora Markley was dead; if so, he was free. And just now he would have given ten years of his life to be free. Impulsive and quick to decide, he was soon determined to go to Weston and enquire into the matter. And still, a great dread filled his soul. If he should find her alive and destitute his duty was very plain. If she desired it, he must acknowledge her as his wife, and he almost came to the conclusion, that in this case ignorance was bliss. As he was, he could at least worship Violet at a distance, with no one to molest or make afraid; but he knew that such a course would only madden him —she must be all the world to him or nothing. Honor was too powerful a characteristic of his being for him to compromise it in any way, and with a firm, resolute determination he settled the question with himself—he would go at once to the little village and seek his bride. If she was dead, his way was clear, if not—he dared not think upon the alternative—that way led to future disappointment and bitter anguish.

## CHAPTER VII.—Carl's Visit to Weston.

Three years had made but little change in the cottage home of Jane Day. Rufus was the same obstinate, repulsive being, who so persistently persecuted Dora Markley with his proposal of marriage, and the mother had become more soured in disposition, if such a thing was possible, during her three years of disappointment.

Ever since the hour she had taken the little baby stranger into her home, she had determined that in time she should become the wife of her son, not from any love she had for her, but be-

cause of the conviction she had that some day the child would be the possessor of wealth; and on account of her plans, Dora's sudden disappearance had proved the bitterest disappointment of her life. They had sought everywhere imaginable for her, but she seemed as completely lost to them as though the sod covered her.

Rufus Day's greed for money was the over-ruling passion of his soul, and he was always looking about him to see how he might gain his desire, without any labor on his part. It mattered little to him whether the result was reached through cunning, theft, or cruel deception, so he became the possessor of the coveted wealth. His mother, although once conscientious, had, by association with vice, become equally as hardened and sinful as her son.

Little did Carl Leslie realize the character of those whom he had to deal with, as he walked slowly along the path past the spring, around which clustered the remembrance of an event whose influence must fashion and guide his life through all the years to come, then on up to the door of the cottage. He knocked tremblingly, almost expecting to see the face of his child-wife, but instead, the door was opened by the resolute hand of Mrs. Day, who bid him most ungraciously to enter.

"Am I addressing Mrs. Day?" Carl asked politely.

"Yes, sir, that is my name. Won't you take a chair," Mrs. Day replied.

Carl seated himself, then glanced across the room at the surly face of Rufus, before speaking.

Mrs. Day noticed his glance of enquiry, and said:

"If you have anything to say, out with it. This is my son Rufus. I have no secrets from him."

Carl shuddered as he remembered that it was from this beast of a man he had saved the fair young girl, and for the moment he could not find it in his heart to regret the course he had taken. Death would have been preferable to life with such a man, and he did not wonder that she had hated him so intensely.

"Mrs. Day, I wish to ask you a few questions concerning a young girl who was living with you some three years ago. Is Dora Markley still here?" Carl said, every word falling from his lips as though he was pronouncing his own doom.

Mrs. Day almost sprang from her chair, when Carl spoke the name of Dora Markley, while Rufus raised his head with a sud-

den show of interest. This was just what they had been expecting for years. It had been an undefinable conviction with them that some time a wealthy gentleman would call and enquire for her, but they had hoped by that time, through her marriage with the son, to be able to share her good fortune. Now the desired opportunity had presented itself, but they were powerless to profit by it—the bird had defied its fetters and the cage was empty.

"No, sir, Dora is not here," replied Mrs. Day, cautiously. "What do you want of her?"

"Is she alive, or dead?" asked Carl. "If living, do you know where she is?"

"Of course I know where she is, but what do you want of her?" responded Mrs. Day, nervously. "If you are after a girl to work, I will let you know, Dora don't work out."

Rufus gave one look of surprise at his mother, then thinking that she understood herself perfectly, he resumed his expression and attitude of stubborn indifference.

Carl's heart almost lost its courage as he listened to the coarse, repulsive creature, and thought of Dora as being like her.

"No, Mrs. Day, I am not looking for a servant girl," he said, "I desire to see Dora Markley, because I have something to say to her that will be to her advantage to hear."

"Oh, that is it, is it?" and Mrs. Day's eyes sought the floor quickly, to conceal the sudden gleam of eagerness that flashed from them. "Did you come from her father?"

"From her father?" repeated Carl wonderingly. "Certainly not. Perhaps you are not aware that the girl was married some three years ago?"

"Oh, yes, she told us about the wedding down by the spring, but we did not believe it. You see, it isn't often that a young man marries a girl, and leaves her the moment the ceremony is performed, and stays away three years—that is contrary to human nature."

"Well, Mrs. Day it was a bone fide wedding, I assure you. I am well acquainted with the young man. He started for Europe immediately after Dora was made his wife, and has but recently returned. He desires to learn something of her through me. Can you tell me where I may find her?"

Mrs. Day knit her brow into a pucker of disagreeable wrinkles as she thought what was the best course to pursue.

"She is off on a little visit just now, but will be back in a few days," she said. "I expect she will be powerful glad to hear from her husband, even if he has treated her so shabbily. You call again in a week or so and she will be at home."

Carl could not reply. His whole soul revolted against an interview with his wife. He began to feel assured that he would find Dora as rude and uncouthed as her aunt. Oh, that he had listened to the advice of Earnest Treherne! But regrets were vain and useless. He must meet the ordeal, and abide by the result. He must reap that which he had so carelessly sown.

"I will call again soon, Mrs. Day," he said, as he rose to take his leave.

As the sound of his footsteps ceased to echo back from the frozen path, Rufus burst out into a coarse, disagreeable laugh.

"Why, mother, what in the name of common sense was you driving at?" he said, with a knowing wink of his eye. "I knew that you was up to something, so I held my tongue for fear of spoiling it."

"Well enough that you did, Rufus. You always was a sorry bungler at talk. I see through that young man, if he does think himself so wonderfully smart. He is the one himself who married Dora, but just where she is beats my time. Why, I made sure she was with him."

"I thought that you knew all about her, mother, and was going to have her here in a week or so," said Rufus, with another loud laugh. "What was your idea for saying that? What are you up to now?"

"Well, you see, my boy, I had not the heart to disappoint the anxious young husband, and if Dora does not return before he does, I shall have some one here who will answer the same purpose. If we keep our eyes open we may get some money out of it after all. That young man will pay a good round sum before he will accept the Dora Markley I shall show him, for a wife."

"Ah, I see! You are a deep one, mother," said Rufus, admiringly. "Who have you in your mind to personate Dora?"

Mrs. Day looked into the face of her son a moment, almost disgusted at his lack of penetration.

"Now, Rufus, that is just like you! Can you not think of some girl of you acquaintance, who, because of her affection for you, would be willing to oblige you in this matter? I can, if you are too modest."

"Why, mother, you don't mean Kate Carter, do you? She is only about half-witted."

"Don't you be so sure, Rufus. She has more sense than you give her credit for. She is more innocent than foolish. Don't you think that you could persuade her to assume the name of Dora Markley for the occasion? You might promise to marry her after you get some money from the young man."

Rufus looked at his mother in complete amazement at her proposition; although he did not for a moment question the fitness of her suggestion, he wondered at the inexhaustible resource of her evil mind. If there was any trait in his character at all praise-worthy it was his profound respect for his mother's judgment and forethought. "Why, I suppose so," he stammered. "I guess that she would do about as I would say in the affair. Do you really think the young man will plank down, mother?"

"Of course he will, Rufus!" replied Mrs. Day, decidedly. "He would not take that Carter girl away with him for the best house and lot in Weston. Never you fear. You get the girl to agree to help us, and I will manage the rest of the business."

"Yes, mother, but Kate don't look any more like Dora did than a sunflower resembles a rose. He will detect the fraud at once."

"Not a bit of it, Rufus. Dora was but fifteen years old when he saw her. Three years works a great change in a girl of that age. I doubt if we would know her ourselves if we were to meet her now."

Rufus did not so express himself, but he thought quite different from his mother—he believed that he would recognize Dora among ten thousand. If there was any one in the world whom he loved equally with himself it was the fair, winsome child who had grown up to girlhood by his side.

"All right, mother, we will try it anyhow!" he said rubbing his hands together gleefully. "It promises something exciting at least, but I would freely give all we shall make out of the venture, to know where Dora is."

CHAPTER VIII.—"IN THE GLOAMING."

Carl Leslie returned to the city, glad of even a few days of respite from that which he so much dreaded. He was determined not to seek Violet under any consideration, because each meeting with her made him less strong to resist her sweet power of fascination; and, like wavering humanity, he betrayed his lack of will by calling upon her the evening of his return from Weston.

Violet met him at the door of the parlor, her fair face aglow with joy, her eyes luminous with love, and her crimson lips smiling him a welcome. Carl had thought to be very reserved, but it was not possible to withstand the enchantment of the fair young girl, and he submitted himself unreservedly to the mesmerism of her presence, promising himself to be more courageous in the future.

Somehow Carl could not trust himself to talk with Violet this evening. Every moment but impressed him more and more with the magnitude of his loss, and the depth of his suffering; and because of a desire for safety as well as a longing to listen again to her thrilling voice, he begged for some music and led her to the piano. Violet did not know that he had paid a visit to Weston, but intuitively she realized that every faculty of his being was striving to cast off the silken chains of bondage which her love had woven around him, and because of her right to his loyalty, and feeling that the act was not unwomanly, she rejoiced in the knowledge that he was unable to give her up. A freak of perverseness prompted her in choice of song, and with all the pathos of her glorious voice she began to sing:

"In the gloaming, oh, my darling, when the lights are dim and low;
And the quiet shadows falling, softly come, and softly go;
When the winds are sobbing faintly, with a gentle unknown woe,
Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?

"In the gloaming, oh, my darling, think not bitterly of me!
Though I passed away in silence, left you lonely, set you free,
For my heart was crushed with longing, what had been could never be,
It was best to leave you thus dear, best for you and best for me."

When the last words had merged into an impressive silence Violet turned and glanced at Carl, and a sudden rush of dismay thrilled her heart-strings, as she observed the expression of acute

anguish in his dark eyes, and how the great veins stood out upon his broad brow, so suggestive of his keen suffering.

"Carl!" she said soltly.

He raised his head and reached out his arms dispairingly toward her, while all the torture of a life-time found utterance in his low, dispirited voice.

"Oh, Violet, Violet! How can I give you up? I have been so weak, so unmanly, but God help me. I could not resist your sweet self! I ought to have fled your presence the first moment that I knew my own heart, but I was not brave enough. Now, I can only ask that you forgive and think not bitterly of me. Your song but echos the sad refrain of my heart—never was there heart so crushed with longing as mine. But, Violet, darling,

"It was best to leave you thus dear, best for you and best for me!"

Carl bowed his head again in pitiful distress, not daring to read the look of contempt that he felt must shine forth from her truthful, honest eyes.

"Carl, it was all my fault," Violet faltered, as she turned and laid her hand upon his arm. "I did not hide my love from you. Forgive, Carl, forgive me! It is right—it does not compromise your honor when you express your love for me."

"Stop, Violet! I cannot bear it!" said Carl, hoarsely, his face pale as death. "You did not know—you cannot understand. God only knows the strait I am in! Humiliating as it is, I must confess to you, that I am a married man. Don't despise me, Violet, if you can help it? Let me tell you all while I have the courage. Three years ago, just as I was on the eve of departure for Europe, I, with my friend, Earnest Treherne, a young minister, were passing through the village of Weston. A wreck of freight cars detained us several hours, and to pass away the time, we wandered aimlessly outside the village limits, until we were attracted by the pitiful sobbings of a young girl. We questioned her and found out that although but a child in years, her aunt, with whom she lived, was going to force her into a hateful marriage, and it seemed that nothing could save her. That very day was to have been my wedding day, but at the last moment, she whom I trusted, dismissed me for a wealthier suitor; and with the feeling of injustice burning in my heart, I came in the way of the distressed girl, and without a thought

of after consequences, I was married to her by my friend, the minister. I left within an hour and have never seen her since. I saved her from the companionship of a coarse, repulsive man; but oh, at what a fearful cost to myself! Now, Violet, you know the worst—I have withheld nothing from you. No, not the worst. I had almost hoped that death had canceled that vow, but it is not so. I have visited Weston, and my wife still lives with her Aunt."

"What!" cried Violet, breathlessly. "Your wife at Weston?"

"Yes, Violet. I shall go down next week and see what terms I can make with her—I can never live with her. It would be a living death after association with my pure Violet, even if she was an angel."

Carl did not notice anything unusual in Violet's manner—he was too much occupied with his own distress. He saw only pardonable curiosity in her abrupt expression, while Violet fairly grew desperate at the thought that some one was imposing on Carl. She was going to confess all but a moment before, but it was best now to wait and see what the development would be. She well knew that nothing low and scheming was beyond the invention of Mrs. Day and her son, but she could not imagine who they would present as Dora Markley.

At last Carl broke the silence, his voice burdened with intense emotion.

"Violet, what have you to say? Is it banishment forever from your presence, or can you forgive and pity one who intended you no wrong—one whose worst fault was weakness, not willful dishonor?"

Violet lifted her pure face and looked searchingly into the dark eyes before her, then a smile of exquisite tenderness played around her rosy lips, and the joy of possession made rich her young heart.

"Carl, I love you!" she said in low, tender tones. "Where I have given my love, there can be no law of banishment, no lack of faith, no thought of wrong. I can only see your intentions—not the results. Come to me after your visit to Weston, and remember that 'it is always darkest just before day.'"

Carl turned his head away with a gesture of utter abandon, feeling sad, weary and completely heart-broken. He saw no hope

for the future—no light in the darkness, no silver lining to his storm-cloud.

"Violet, darling, your precious words only make the heaven I have lost more desirable—more lovely! Many a man has sacrificed honor, integrity, and even life itself, to claim an avowal of love infinitely less pure than that which you so freely confess, and I am powerless to accept it. Violet, I have not so completely lost my manhood, as to wish you bound to one who is already fettered with the galling chains of a relentless bondage. You are free, free, although your freedom is my slavery—your release is my captivity. Let come what may, my lips shall preserve my uprightness, my honor, inviolate, and until fate smile upon our mutual woe, you shall be only my friend. I shall not again forget the gulf that so fatally separates us but, oh, how much easier for me to be true to myself, now that I possess the knowledge of your sustaining love! God grant that you may not grow weary of waiting on the caprice of fate."

"Carl, never express a doubt of me again," said Violet, earnestly. "I am not Louise Willett. I shall trust and look for your release, until you bid me wait no longer—even if it be unto death."

"I do not doubt you, Violet—forgive me. You have heard of my infatuation, my blind folly, when Mrs. Willett was Louise Dupont? I did not love her, my heart had never been aroused, and I imagined fascination was love. You taught me the sweet, bewildering lesson and made plain my mistake of the past. Now darling, sing over once more those beautiful words—the language of my desolate heart—and when we meet again, I shall be only Carl, the true friend, not Carl, the ardent lover."

Violet rose to her feet, her mind strangely confused at the turn of affairs, and like one in a dream, seated herself at the piano. She let her white fingers stray carelessly over the keys a few moments to gain time to steady her trembling voice, while Carl stood close by her side, his dark eyes drinking in the rapture of her glances, and his very soul feasting on her lovely face, as one dwells upon the face within the casket, expecting soon that the lid will be closed and the contents hid forever.

"I cannot, Carl!" Violet cried, turning toward him, and reaching up her hands beseechingly. "When I sang it before,

I thought you all mine. Now it means so much. Every word speaks of a separation—of a bitter mistake. I was so confident, so brave but a few moments ago, and now a nameless dread fills my heart—a fear of the future."

Carl drew the beautiful head back against him, and looked longingly down into the grieved face.

"If it distresses you so much, Violet, I will not ask it," he said tenderly. "I had imagined that I would have more courage if I might remember those beautiful words, but it does not matter."

"I will try, Carl. You shall not be denied your request."

Violet's sweet voice grew tender and resolute, although the color had left her face, even to her lips, as she drew her hands away from his clinging grasp, and turned back to the keys, and began again to sing, "In the Gloaming," but not as she had sang it before. Every word now breathed the language of a desolate, defrauded heart—of a sadly wrecked life. Somehow she began to realize that in utter defiance of her claim, Carl was to be taken from her—that in truth she was to be a widowed bride, and tremblingly, tearfully, the last verse fell from her lips.

"In the gloaming, oh, my darling, think not bitterly of me;
Though I passed away in silence, left you lonely, set you free,
For my heart was crushed with longing, what had been could never be,
It was best to leave you thus dear, best for you, and best for me."

The small, helpless hands fell away from the keys, and the beautiful head drooped until her pale face was hid from Carl's sight; then he knelt by her side, and taking both her hands in his, pressed them close to his heart, and earnestly, solemnly he repeated,

"It was best to leave you thus dear, best for you, and best for me."

God help us, Violet! It is a bitter, bitter trial. Good-bye, darling, good-bye."

He kissed the hands he held, tenderly, passionately, then rose to his feet, and as he passed from the room, a sob fell on his ear, so like those he would never forget, causing him to hurry his footsteps, for fear his heart would fail him, and as in the past he would turn back and offer his sympathy and comfort.

## CHAPTER IX.—A Pair of Rogues.

One week of restless, feverish anxiety had passed, and Mrs. Day's cottage contained three eager souls, awaiting the coming of Carl Leslie.

Rufus Day had been in the village the evening before, and had witnessed the arrival of Carl, and now, everything was in readiness to practice their cruel deception. A rather pretty young girl stood before the fire, her hands clasped idly before her, and her gaze fixed on the glowing coals.

She was slight in form, a clear, creamy complexion, dark eyes, and dark, wavy hair, not an unpleasant picture to look upon, but a close observes could detect a lack of will-power, and the expression about her lips betrayed how susceptible she would be to influence, whether for good or evil.

She continued to gaze a long time into the fire, then turning abruptly toward Rufus, she said with a little gesture of impatience:

"Rufus, are you sure that I can depend upon your promise? When I have served you faithfully you will not leave me?"

"Of course not, Kate! I will stick to my promise, never you fear. You help me to handle the young man's tin and you shall share it with me. Are you sure Kate, that you can play your part? If you should make a mistake it would throw us in a pretty muddle."

The slender form drooped a trifle, and the full red lips trembled perceptibly as though she disliked the part she had promised to perform.

"Yes, Rufus, I think I shall make no mistakes," she said slowly. "I have gone over the ground too often for me to stumble in the dark."

Mrs. Day had been standing at the window watching down the path, and at this moment she turned excitedly toward the young couple and said:

"Rufus, the young man is coming! I think that you had better leave the room—Kate will do better without than with you. Now, my girl, don't get excited, but keep your wits about you, and all will be well."

A resolute knock on the door interrupted her, and as Rufus passed out of the room, she admitted Carl Leslie.

Carl gave one searching glance at the slender, drooping figure by the fire, and as he did so the color left his face, and all his cour-

age fled from his heart. He did not doubt, even for a moment that this was the young girl whom he had befriended, and nothing but a great pity for her filled his soul. She had not asked the sacrifice of him—she had only accepted his proposition. Come what would, he dare not blame his girl-bride, she had not forced herself upon him, he would at least meet her kindly.

Mrs. Day watched Carl's face, noting every change of expression, every gleam of piety that flashed from his dark eyes, and she drew a deep sigh of relief that he had accepted the situation so readily.

"You wanted to see Dora Markley," she said. "This is the girl."

Kate raised her head, and glanced at Carl, and she could but admire his handsome face, and noble bearing, even while her heart was full of deception toward him.

Carl read only embarrassment and timidity in that hasty glance, and desiring to make his visit as brief and concise as possible, he said:

"Dora, are you the young girl who was married some three years ago down by the spring?"

"Why, yes sir! Don't you remember me?" she replied, with a show of bashful earnestness. "I would have known you anywhere. You have not changed at all, but I have grown taller, is the reason you did not know me."

Carl believing that he was recognized, thought it would be folly to deny that he was her husband, and he determined to face the case fairly, and if possible come to satisfactory terms.

"Well, Dora, if you remember me, you also recollect that I said in all probability we would never meet again, and that only in name would you ever be my bride, but circumstances have brought me back to New York, and not wishing to do anything dishonorable, I have come to make you a proposition."

"Oh, sir, I am very sorry, but I cannot go with you! I must not leave Aunt Jane," Kate exclaimed in well-feigned excitement. "She is growing old, and I must take care of her. She was kind to me when I was a helpless child."

Carl's heart grew light as he listened to Kate. She had but anticipated his desire in the matter, and because of her decided expression, he saw an easy way out of the disagreeable entanglement.

"Dora, I had no thought of taking you from Mrs. Day," he said. "The proposition I have to make is this: I will agree to

pay you one thousand dollars a year for your support, providing that you do not assume the name of Leslie, and do not annoy me in any way. Is it a bargain ?"

A thrill of exultation came to Mrs. Day's heart, as she listened to the munificent offer of Carl, and also because of the knowledge of his name. She had not dared to ask him, and she did not know how to work successfully without it. Fate had favored her, and unconsciously Carl had given her the information that she so much desired. Kate glanced covertly at Mrs. Day, who slyly signified her approval, then she said :

"Yes, sir, I agree to all that you propose. I will never bother you in any way. I am only Dora Markley, a plain country girl, and I do not wish to change my name. I would not accept the money, but I have been a burden on Aunt Jane so long, that if I can help her in her old age I would be glad to do so."

Carl was delighted that he had gotten off no easily, when he had expected considerable opposition and trouble.

"It is all right, Dora. So long as you do not seek to incommode me in any way, you shall have your thousand dollars a year. I will send you a check for the amount within the week. Now, that is all, I believe ?"

"Not so fast, Mr. Leslie," said Mrs. Day, turning toward Carl. "I guess Dora would like to have that contract in black and white. Of course, we believe you to be strictly honest in your intentions, but something might happen when it would be safer to have the paper. Isn't that so, Dora ?"

"Yes, Aunt Jane. You know what is best in the matter," replied Kate.

Carl knit his brow in vexation. He did not like the idea of leaving any writing, but he saw no way out of the dilemma.

"Very well, Mrs. Day," he said. "Give me paper and pen and I will make you safe."

Mrs. Day furnished him with the requisites for writing, and after a moment Carl read aloud what he had written.

"I hereby agree to pay Dora Markley the sum of one thousand dollars annually, providing she does not claim the name of Leslie, or molest me in any way. Otherwise, this contract is null and void. CARL LESLIE."

"Does that suit you, Dora ?"

"Yes, sir, I am satisfied with it," replied Kate.

"You understand, Dora, that I regret this little unpleasantness equally with yourself, but I see no other way to arrange it satisfactorily. A divorce would cause a great deal of unnecessary gossip, and would be very humiliating to both."

Carl wanted to ask her if Rufus Day had ever annoyed her after her marriage, but he thought it best not to do so in the presence of Mrs. Day, and he added:

"Good-bye, Dora. I trust that nothing will transpire to give you any uneasiness. I shall not come again. Everything seems to be pleasantly arranged."

"Good-bye, sir. I am sorry that your kindness to me has caused you so much trouble, and I am truly grateful for it all," Kate said with apparent emotion.

Carl bowed to Mrs. Day and Kate, then left the room, little dreaming of the deception that had been so successfully practiced upon him, but on the contrary, feeling a sense of safety that he had not known for many days, while unconsciously his feet were pressing the very verge of a mighty precipice. He had no conception of the intrigue and cunning that lay hid beneath the placid brow of Mrs. Day, nor the power of execution now dormant under the rough exterior of her son Rufus.

In a moment after Carl's departure Rufus came out from the kitchen, a smile on his face and a look of extreme satisfaction in his eyes.

"Bravo, Kate! What a little jewel you are! Why, out there listening, I almost came to the conclusion that we were the ones being hoodwinked, and you was beyond a doubt Dora Markley. I never heard anything to equal it in my life."

Kate's pretty face lit up with a rosy glow of delight at the words of praise from Rufus Day. They were strangely powerful to move the inmost feelings of her soul. In some unaccountable manner she had given the love of her whole heart to him, and because of her infatuation, she was his willing slave, ready to do his bidding, even to the destruction of her own soul.

"Rufus, I have studied out a thing or two," said Mrs. Day, with a wise shake of her head. "Mr. Leslie is making arrangements to marry again, and thinks to buy our silence with a thousand dollars. I guess he don't know the material we are made of—ah, my boy?"

"You are right, mother. He will find out his mistake," replied Rufus, laughingly. "I shall be obliged to take a trip to New York, and see how the land lies. You see, Kate, if we work together and keep our eyes open, we shall be able to set up in grand style, and astonish the upper crust of Weston."

Kate blushed at the direct allusion to the desire of her heart, but did not reply.

"You played your part quite creditably, Kate," said Mrs. Day, "but this is only a stepping-stone to success. If Mr. Leslie is rich, so will we be also. Yes, Rufus, I think that you ought to go to the city for a few days. I do not think it would be right for the gentleman to marry again and his young wife living here with us!"

"Ha, ha, mother! We are too much for him! Kate, you hold yourself in readiness for anything that may present itself, and I will find out all I can about the young man's habits and intentions."

Kate put on her shawl and hood and started for home, little thinking that treachery far worse than that she had shown Carl Leslie, was in store for her—that she had been only the "cat's paw to draw the chestnuts from the fire," and that in no way did they intend to keep faith with her.

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## CHAPTER X.—A Shadow from the Past.

Violet Lincoln carried herself bravely through the days of doubt and misgivings intervening between Carl's disclosure and his return from Weston.

Mr. Lincoln did not detect anything amiss. She was just as animated and gay, as tender and kind, as of old, but when alone her heart was restless and strangely fearful. What would be the result of Carl's second visit to her childhood home? Must he be lost to her forever? Surely Mrs. Day and Rufus would not dare to deceive him so boldly.

One afternoon she grew uneasy beyond endurance. She had tried her music, had spent an hour with Mr. Lincoln, and had visited Mrs. Burnett's room; but all in vain. At last she decided to take a walk, and see if she could not throw off her gloomy thoughts.

For some time a bent, slovenly figure of a man had been lingering near the door of Mr. Lincoln's residence, and as the graceful form of Violet came down the steps, his keen dark eyes

brightened under his slouch hat, betraying his purpose in waiting, and quickening his footsteps he followed her.

Fate seemed to favor the man who was waiting for a sight of the young lady, for she usually went out in her carriage. She walked on quite a distance, little thinking that a relentless plotting demon was so closely following her footsteps.

Some bright fancy work in a window attracted her attention, and she stepped inside the store to purchase it. As she returned to the pavement a slight child-form sprang to her side, and a sweet voice, all excitement and exquisite joy, cried out:

"Oh, Violet! Oh! Oh!"

Violet halted abruptly and let her eyes rest an instant on the bright, upturned face, then caught the child up in her arms.

"Edith, darling! Can it be possible?" she said.

"Yes, Violet, I am little Edith. Let me kiss you again to make sure it is my own dear Violet. But no, it cannot be Violet," and the little arms fell away from around Violet's neck, and all the glow left the sweet face. "I saw her last standing in the fire of the burning vessel, and then we watched it sink into the ocean. But how did you know that my name was Edith? Oh, I thought sure—you are Violet, in spite of all the fire!"

The clinging arms again encircled Violet's neck, and half-doubting, half-sure, Edith laid her flushed cheek close to the fair face she loved so well.

"Yes, Edith, I am Violet. I was saved at the last moment from the vessel," she said tenderly. "I thought that you and Mrs. Lynne were lost. Oh, this is a glad, glad surprise!"

"Well, I guess that was what Papa thought too. You see, Papa, that you are not the gladest one in all the world, after all," said Edith, turning to a gentleman who was standing close by, looking on in amazement.

Violet followed the glance of the child and met the brown eyes of Mr. Vancouver fixed upon her in questioning wonder.

He stepped forward, and lifting his hat courteously, said:

"Good afternoon, Miss Lincoln, Edith seems to have found an old friend in you?"

"Why, Papa! We were together on the vessel when it caught fire, and Violet made the men take me because there was not

room for both, and she stayed alone with the Captain. If it had not been for her they would have taken grandma from me. Oh, Violet, I have cried many and many a time because I thought you was dead! How—what happened? Please tell me how you escaped from the fire?"

"Mr. Vancouver, I was with Edith as she has told you," said Violet, turning to the gentleman, "and we have never met since the life-boat, containing Mrs. Lynne and the child, pulled away from the side of the doomed vessel, until this precious moment. We each thought the other dead. If you do not object I will take her home with me, and we shall have a mutual explanation of our escape. I desire very much to hear her story."

"Oh, yes, Papa, do let me go! You know that you have to go to Brownell's, and you can call for me this evening. I'm going, Papa!"

Edith caught hold of Violet's hand and began eagerly to pull her away.

Mr. Vancouver joined Violet in a merry laugh at the aptness of the child, and her strategy to gain his consent.

"I cannot blame Edith," he said. "I rather admire her taste, Miss Lincoln, and if agreeable I will call for her this evening. I can assure you that I would not have one moment of peace until she has heard the story of your escape. Besides, I desire to thank you for saving the life of my darling, as I cannot do here upon the street."

"You have nothing to thank me for, Mr. Vancouver, but I would be delighted with a call from you this evening. Come, Edith, shall we go?"

And hand in hand, Violet and Edith turned away, followed by the steady gaze of two men. The eyes of one filled with a tender admiring expression, and those of the other flooded with triumph and excitement, and as the bent form of the man who had been loitering near Violet's home went hurriedly away in the opposite direction to that taken by the delighted girls, he muttered:

"I cannot be mistaken. It is she and none other. No one ever loses anything by watching the corners. This is a rare find for me."

Violet and Edith spent the remainder of the afternoon in relating the way and manner in which each had escaped the destruction threatened by both fire and water. Edith renewed her acquaintance with her old friend, Mr. Lincoln, bringing many a hearty laugh from his lips because of her quaint humor and bright wit. Then quite early in the evening Mr. Vancouver came in, and the story had to be repeated, and when Violet would speak lightly of her service toward the child, Edith would interrupt her, sometimes with tears, but always with an exaggerated account of the affair, very much to Violet's credit, until she blushed with dismay at the misrepresentation, and Mr. Vancouver's elaborate thanks. The chance meeting with Edith had driven away, for the time, all unpleasant thoughts, and she was exquisitely happy, and after they had taken their leave, she acknowledged to herself that the gentleman was wonderfully entertaining, and Edith just the dearest child in all the world.

The meeting again of those two, so rudely separated, was seemingly but a trifling matter, but in the days of crushing sorrow to come, it was to materially assist in unraveling a strange tangled thread of mystery—just as our Heavenly Father intends our misguided lives to be straightened and brightened by instruments and means entirely unknown to us.

After Violet had gone to her room and was preparing to retire, Mrs. Burnett tapped at the door, and upon it being opened, handed her a letter, saying :

"Miss Violet, this letter was left for you this evening, but as you had company, I thought that it could wait. I have no doubt but it is another call for charity, as he was a distressed looking old man who left it."

Violet received the letter and tossed it carelessly upon the table, without the least curiosity as to its contents.

"Why did you not give him something and save me the trouble, Mrs. Burnett?" she said pleasantly.

"You are the Lady Bountiful, Miss Violet, not I," replied Mrs. Burnett, laughingly, as she turned from the door.

When Violet had gotten through with the services of her maid she dismissed her and sat down a few moments before retiring, to think over the incidents of the day, and to wonder what Carl was doing.

She sat some time in musing, then her eyes fell on the neglected letter, and indifferently she took it up and opened it. The careless expression lingered a moment, then changed to a look of absolute terror and dismay. It read thus:

"My Dear Child—After all these years of patient, ceaseless search I have found my own precious daughter. It seems almost impossible, but I cannot be mistaken. You are the perfect image of your mother, else I might have passed you by in your grandeur. I cannot understand your position in the home of wealth, but will eagerly wait an explanation. It is not best that I should come to you, but I shall be waiting for you at the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth street, to-morrow at 2 P. M. Do not disappoint your old father, whose heart aches for a word with his child. Raymond Meredith."

Every drop of blood left Violet's sweet face, while she read and re-read the startling contents of the letter. She had thought that nothing could give her more pleasure than to find her father, but now that he was within her reach her heart rebelled against his claim upon her. Could the one who had left the letter be her father? Then she remembered that Mrs. Burnett had said that he was distressed looking. What if he was not a gentleman? Must she leave her beautiful home, and dear Uncle Robert, and go with him into a life of poverty? She did not doubt but that she was his child—had he not signed himself Raymond, and the name was not a common one? Should she keep the appointment that he had made? Yes, she must see him and satisfy herself—after that she would think of the future. What would Carl think of the matter? Would he still love her even if she was forced to own a vagabond father? Oh, how the troublesome thoughts flashed through her agitated brain, keeping sleep from her pillow many hours of the night! And the quiet, sad face at the breakfast-table drew many anxious glances and questions from Mr. Lincoln, only to be answered with a pitiful attempt at a smile from Violet.

She spent the hours intervening between breakfast and the dreaded time of meeting with the author of her disquietude, in torturing eagerness and reluctant dismay. Why must the placid current of her life-stream be so suddenly changed into a turbulent wave, covering but partially the foam-crowned rocks? Why

must life possess its mysteries, its doubts, its fears? No answer came to soothe her wildly throbbing heart, but the oft repeated thought, vague and misty, that it was God's way, and that somehow, He leadeth her,

> "In pastures green? Not always; sometimes He,
> Who knoweth best, in kindness leadeth me,
> In weary ways, where heavy shadows be,
> And by still waters? No, not always so;
> Ofttimes the heavy tempests round me blow,
> And o'er my soul the waves and billows go."

Prompt at the appointed hour and place, Violet found a bent, ragged man awaiting her coming, and as he stepped eagerly forward she scanned his face with questioning interest, but the untidy, heavy beard, covered the greater portion of his countenance, and the glance from his eyes brought no thrill of recognition to her soul.

"You were kind to come, my child," he said.

Violet shrank back from his out-stretched hand, a sickening sensation taking possession of her. Was it possible that this repulsive, hardened vagabond was the father whom she had so much wished for?

"Are you my father, in truth?" she asked in low, quivering tones. "How do you know that I am the one you were seeking?"

"Why, bless your sweet face! You are so much like your mother was at your age," he said with a great show of fatherly feeling. "Did you not live for a long time with Jane Day, near the village of Weston, and was you not called Dora Markley at that time?"

"Oh, yes, yes! But why did you not claim me years ago, before —"

The dainty form drooped, and the low, pained voice ceased abruptly, as she buried her face in her hands.

"Now, child, don't get worried. I know that I am a sorry looking father for so elegant a young lady to acknowledge, but no one need know our relationship but ourselves," he said, consolingly, every word falling like ice on her soul, driving out all the warmth and glow. "You seem to have fallen into a cosy nest somehow, and low as I am, I am not dog enough to drag you down to my level. All I want is, that you help your old

father upon his feet again, and if you do that, you can go on living just as you are now, and no one the wiser. What do you say?"

She turned her soulful eyes and looked into his face. Could it be that the same blood coursed through their veins—that this man was the author of her existence? She could not call him father. She could not even look at him without a thrill of disgust.

"Have you no reply to make to my offer?" he said at last.

"Yes, I accept your proposition," she said, faintly, realizing that anything was preferable to companionship with this man. "How much money do you want, and where shall I send it?"

"Oh, only a trifle child—five hundred will do at present. You can hand that amount to me this time to-morrow, and at this place—be sure that you come yourself. I am a little under the weather now, child, but when I was young, I was a gentleman and no mistake. They told me down at Weston that you was married and gone, but I see they were mistaken in part. Now I have just a little word of caution to give you—don't try the marriage dodge on me, or I shall ventilate our whole transaction, and the world shall know that you are old Ray Meredith's own flesh and blood, the daughter of a gambler, not the stunning Miss Violet Lincoln. That is all, I guess. You will be sure and be on hand to-morrow?"

"I will be here," Violet replied, and without another word the sorely tried girl turned away and sought her home.

## CHAPTER XI.—Love's Regrets.

The following day Violet fulfilled her promise, by meeting the one whom she had been thus led to believe was her father, and giving him the sum of money he had named; but she would not stop to converse with him. Her pure face paled, her lovely eyes were filled with an expression of shame, and a shiver of repulsion passed over her slender form, as her hand came in contact with the one extended toward her. But the disagreeable task had been performed, and her safety had been bought for the time, and with a slight lifting of the weight that was pressing down her very soul, she turned toward home. She had retraced her way but a

short distance when Carl Leslie overtook her and walked by her side.

Oh, how he did love the sweet, violet-eyed girl! Every pulse of his being responded to her glance. Every thought that welled up from his heart was enriched with love—a burning, consuming love—that was far more painful than sweet, under the circumstances. She loved him, yet he dared not take her to his heart—it would be unmanly to even kiss her perfect crimson-lips. Oh, cruel, cruel fate! They entered the hall and passed into the parlor, and as they seated themselves, Violet turned to Carl with a sad attempt at gayety.

"Mr. Carl Leslie, where have you been hiding so long? Give an account of yourself?" she said.

But Carl's eyes of love were not to be deceived, so readily. He noted with distress how pale her face had become, and what a sad, pleading light shone from her eyes.

"Darling, I have been trying to accustom myself to living without the light of my star—to accept the darkness that has come to my life—but it is like a man stricken with sudden blindness, who has feasted his eyes upon all the beauty and grandeur of nature. It is taking all from me that I hold dear in this life, leaving me empty-hearted, to grope in the shadows of despair."

Violet looked up into the handsome face of her lover, so earnest in his love, so thrilling in his regret, and realized that she had never loved him so much as at this moment.

"Hush, Carl," she said solemnly. "There are worse things in this life to contend with than those you speak of—life itself is a strange panorama of changes and mystery. We cannot always cling to sweet illusions—the awakening must come sometime." Then, as though to divert his mind from herself, she added. "You have been to Weston? Tell me the result?"

"Yes, Violet, I have been to Weston. I have seen and talked with Dora Markley—my wife, and if I had never known you in all your regal beauty, I could not live with this low-born girl. I would rather die than acknowledge relationship with so low a class!"

Violet shrank from his emphatic denunciation of the lower class—it seemed so personal just now. Who could reach a lower

strata in society than that in which her father walked? If he knew all the crushing secret of her origin he would shun her as he would a pestilence. She could never confess to him now, that it was her hand that had rested in his—her lips that had so willingly given a caress, sealing her heart forever against the invasion of any other love; she could only share his silent suffering, never daring to hope for a lifting of the shadow, never betraying a daughter's shame.

"What is it, Violet?" Carl said tenderly. "You look so white and distressed. I would to God, that I could bear it all —that I could suffer for both."

"It is nothing Carl. I will be more brave in the future," Violet said, with an effort at control, pitiful to see. "You saw and talked with Dora Markley, what was she like? Did she resemble the young girl whom you married?"

"Violet, I do not remember but very little about the child I made my wife. I do not think that I would even recognize her again; but it would not be a difficult task to imagine her, after three years, developed into the young girl I met at the cottage. She was tall, dark eyed, fair, and pretty, but her low birth covered her like a mantle."

"Are you sure, Carl, that she is Dora Markley?" questioned Violet.

"Yes, Violet, too sure. Who else could she be?"

Aye, who else could she be? Violet wondered. She knew full well that it was the work of Mrs. Day and Rufus; but who they had selected to act the part of the child-bride?

"What terms did you make with them, Carl?"

"They are never to molest me in any way whatever. Dora is to retain her maiden name, and I am to give her one thousand dollars annually, so long as she keeps faith with me."

"Preposterous, Carl! They dare not do so bold an act," exclaimed Violet, unguardedly. "I mean, they are a little extravagant in their demands, are they not?"

"Oh, no, Violet, I would rather pay twice the sum than be forced to live with her, or bear the publicity of a divorce," he replied quickly.

What a strange tangle their lives were assuming. Carl was paying one thousand dollars to an imposter, to keep his marriage

a secret from the world, while Violet had given five hundred to buy the silence of her father. Oh, that she might lay her head upon the breast of Carl, and confess that she was his own true wife, and crown both hearts with the contentment of love! But it was too late. The vagabond father was a barrier of shame and disgrace that she was powerless to remove. "God pity them both!

> 'For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these:
> It might have been!'"

"Carl," she said at last, in quivering, beseeching tones, "Our lives are strangely knit together, but somehow, fate, in a freakish moment has dropped a stitch, and in failing to take it up, the rent in the web is growing wider every moment, and not even the honest love of both can repair the damage. Oh, Carl, Carl! must I permit you to go out from my life? Must I give you up?"

Violet reached forth her hands to Carl, in tender entreaty and passionate hopelessness. He started to take her in his arms, but with a mighty struggle, he controlled himself, and only clasped her white, trembling hands in his.

"No, darling, never! You are more to me as you are this this moment—unattainable as Heaven—than all else in this world! I would rather claim my pure Violet as my friend, than possess the love of the fairest woman on earth. Circumstances, bitter and cruel as death, separate us as lovers, but we can clasp hands as friends. No other love shall come into my existence. My heart is rich in the presence of your image, although my arms are empty, and my life barren and aimless. You are mine in spirit, Violet, all mine!"

As Carl's hot, impetuous words fell on her ear, Violet bowed her head upon his hands, her eyes overflowing with glad tears, and her desolate heart, for the moment, flooded with delight, because of his love for her. Come what might in the future, she realized that no earthly power could deprive her of that rich blessing. Carl had declared that she belonged to him, and it was so.

"Carl, surely Heaven will interpose, and remove every barrier to a love like ours," she said softly. "We will not be discouraged but trust that in time all will be well." Then, with a sudden change of tone she exclaimed: "Mrs. Willett called a few days ago. I think she has the sweetest face I ever looked upon,

and in spite of Carl Leslie, I am sure we shall be fast friends. I wonder that you did not love her, Carl. It seems impossible to withhold honest admiration, even if one might have cause for the least bit of jealousy. I would not be surprised if she still loved you, although she treated you badly. I could not dislike her even if she did—there is something so indiscribably attractive about her."

"You have nothing to fear from Louise Willett, Violet," said Carl, earnestly. "All the worship of my soul is freely given to you, and nothing can recall it. Earnest Treherne said that he believed her caprice on the eve of our marriage, was God's Providence, and I think that he was prophetic in his assertion. My heart had never been touched by the dart of Cupid, until I met my fate in you; and, if I had married Louise, time would have undeceived me, when it would have been too late."

"Where is Earnest Treherne, Carl?" asked Violet.

"I do not know, Violet. He was with me in Europe, but he did not return home at the time I did. He has fallen heir to quite a large estate, and I should not wonder if he would leave the ministry. He is the strangest mixture of spiritual wisdom, and worldly craving, I ever saw—just good enough to be an example for us wild boys, and has a sufficient amount of human nature still clinging around him to make him a jolly fellow for a companion. You ought to meet him, Violet. I am sure that you would like him."

Violet smiled as she thought how surprised Carl would be if she should tell him that she had met Earnest Treherne, and from what she could remember, that she did not like him at all. She recalled with a shudder his reluctance to perform the marriage ceremony, and how stern his voice grew when he had repeated, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." And she was permitting her own father to come between her and the one she had promised to 'love, honor and cherish,' so long as life would last. Was she acting wisely? Ought she not to tell him all, let the result be what it might? But it might be banishment from his heart, it might be loathing and contempt for her deception and her origin. She could not risk his decision. She dare not confess, even if it was right.

"Is Mr. Treherne married, Carl?" she asked.

"No, Violet, so far as I know he is heart-whole."

"Well, we will let him have Louise Willett, won't we, Carl?" Violet said archly.

"Oh, Violet! What a wild fancy. Louise Willett the wife of Earnest Treherne!" and Carl laughed merrily at the absurdity of the suggestion. "I would as soon think of you marrying Mr. Vancouver. By the way, he seemed wonderfully interested in a certain sweet singer on the evening of the party at Travers. How do you like him, Violet?"

"Oh, he is just splendid! Why, Carl, he has spent the evening here since then with his daughter. Is it not strange that his child and I, were together on the vessel which took fire in mid-ocean? I met them on the street a few days ago, and Edith knew me at once. I never met a stranger who seemed so near to me as Mr. Vancouver, but I suppose it is because he is Edith's father."

"Take care, darling! He is spoken of as extremely fascinating, and I fear I shall betray my selfishness if you make any more such assertions," said Carl, half-jestingly and half-earnestly.

"For shame, Carl!" and two white hands stole into his, and a pair of violet eyes were raised to his face, filled with a tender, loving glow. "To love once with me, is forever. Mr. Vancouver could only be my friend, even if a closer relationship was desired by him."

"Well, Violet, it seems that I am favored no more than he, in that particular. I can only be your friend," and a thrill of regret lingered along every tone.

Just at this moment the door opened, and Mr. Lincoln entered the room.

"Excuse me, Heart's-ease, I did not know that you had company. Good evening, Carl! I do not see much of you of late. New York is very gay at present, eh, my boy? What do you say, Violet, to hearing Patti this evening?"

"Oh, Uncle Robert, that would be so nice! I have never listened to Patti," exclaimed Violet, eagerly.

"Pooh, Violet! I would not give one of your sweet songs for a complete Opera of hers. Carl, you will join us, will you not?"

Carl looked toward Violet questioningly—he would be glad to meet them there if she desired it.

"Oh, yes, Carl! Do please go," she said.

"Thank you, Mr. Lincoln. If nothing interferes, I will be pleased to occupy a chair in your box. Now, I have tarried so much longer than I intended, I must—"

"All right, my boy, I shall expect you! Good night!" and Mr. Lincoln very discreetly withdrew from the room with all possible haste.

Carl turned to Violet, his face suddenly clouded, and his eyes saddened with thought.

"Violet, I dislike so much to say good-bye. I am always fearing that something will take you from me, and that it will be good-bye, forever. I know the thought is exceedingly foolish. God will take of my darling, so long as He has denied me that privilege."

Violet looked up with a quick brightening of her lovely eyes. Yes, God would take care of her! How these words had power to stir her soul to its utmost depths, ever since Carl has uttered them by the bubbling spring in the woodland.

"We will not say good-bye, Carl. It shall be au revoir until this evening."

And Violet held out her hand, forcing a smile to her lips for Carl's sake. Then after he had passed from the room, she stood silent as a piece of marble statuary, just where he had left her, thinking, thinking, always thinking now. No sweet song unconsciously rippled from her lips, no silvery laugh echoed through the lofty rooms—only a low, grieved voice, a sad, wistful smile, and a slow, reluctant step, were left to the beautiful, young girl.

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## CHAPTER XII.—A Jealous Freak.

Several weeks have passed—weeks replete with outward gayety to Carl and Violet, but within their hearts a longing, craving, unexpressed misery.

Violet's father had persecuted her almost beyond endurance, with his exorbitant demands for money, and at last with the command that she would leave Mr. Lincoln and come to him. His evil mind had conceived the thought that more money could be realized by making a public singer of her—by making merchandise of her magnificent voice—than by demands upon the wealth of her benefactor, Mr. Lincoln.

Louise Willett had become very much at home at Mr. Lincoln's, and she and Violet were the best of friends. All the nobility of her character had been awakened by her love for Violet. She had striven to win Carl back to her side, simply to gratify her love of power, but she soon understood how useless was the trial. Every glance from his eye, every word uttered by him in the presence of Violet, bespoke a love deep and pure as the breathings of a redeemed soul. And, generous almost to a fault, she determined that she would at least command his respect by completely surrendering all thought of reclaiming his allegiance, and, by companionship with the girl of his choice, all that was good and pure in her passionate, impulsive nature, beautified her life, while her friendship to the tortured, distressed girl, was like a plank thrown out to some submersed unfortunate, and sometimes Violet felt but for her she would lay down her arms and let come the crushing denouncement.

Mr. Lincoln, Carl and Violet were all groping in the darkness of misunderstanding. Mr. Lincoln thought his Heart's-ease grieving because Carl did not love her sufficient to make her his wife, and because of her pride was wasting her young life away. Carl believed her to be losing her bloom on account of her knowledge of the existence of his wife, while the fair girl had forced herself to give up all hope of ever claiming Carl's love, because her father was a low-born vagabond.

During the weeks that had passed Rufus Day and his mother had been staying in the city, leaving their accomplice, Kate Carter, in her home at Weston, to first wonder, then to grow suspicious of them both, and to fear that now after she had served them that they had cast her off. If Rufus was going to marry her as he had promised, why did he remain away from her? What was his business in the city? These thoughts multiplied themselves in her mind day after day, until she resolved to go and see for herself why her lover tarried so long from her side.

She knew Mrs. Day's address, but she did not intend to go to her—she only desired to make sure that Rufus had not become weary of her and taken a fancy to some one fairer than she. An advertisement in a daily paper gave her the opportunity she so much desired.

Mrs. Willett's waiting maid had become insolent and careless, and it was her advertisement for another that had attracted the attention of Kate, and with very little preparation she started for the city. With considerable inquiry she found Mrs. Willett's elegant home and was admitted to her presence, and her slender, tidy figure, pretty face, and modest manner, pleased the lady, and without any trouble whatever she was engaged. Louise Willett loved everything beautiful, and the shy, sweet prettiness of the country girl caught her fancy, just as a stray flower by the wayside might have done, she little thinking what the result of her indulgent fancy would lead to, or what strange developments her coming would bring to light.

Kate did not take kindly to her new life at first, but she had not come to enjoy herself—she had come to investigate. Her eyes were constantly upon the alert for a glimpse of the form she so strangely loved—strange, because there seemed nothing in common between her and Rufus. He was tyranical, stubborn, uncouth, and far from handsome in face and form, while she was confiding, yielding, affectionate, and pretty. But for all that, her heart's best love had been lavished upon him—lavished all in vain.

The first week passed without a ripple of interest to her, but one afternoon soon after, as she was walking in the vicinity of the address given her by Mrs. Day, she came upon a beautiful young girl, standing talking to an old poverty-marked man. Something about the elegantly dressed lady seemed familiar. Where had she seen that graceful, haughty lifting of the head, those dark violet eyes, and perfect crimson lips? She glanced carelessly at the old man, who, she supposed, had been asking charity from the young lady, and instantly the color fled from her face, and a look of wonder filled her eyes, for despite his disguise she recognized in him her miscreant lover, Rufus Day. What did it mean? Why was he disguised? She entered a millinery store, and under the pretense of examining a hat, she watched the strange couple. At last the lady with a gesture of thrilling despair turned away, and hastening out from the store Kate joined the impostor, and as he turned to see who was walking so close by his side, she said:

"Why, Rufus Day! What in the world are you dressed up in this fashion for?"

Had an angel appeared by his side and spoken, he could not have been more surprised.

"Kate Carter! What are you doing here?" he asked, breathlessly.

"Answer my question, Rufus, and I will tell you why I am here?" Kate said, almost sternly.

Rufus had regained his composure by this time, and a low, cunning laugh came from his lips.

"Oh, only a little masquerading, Kate!" he said. "They all do that in the city. Why, it is almost impossible to find anything here that is honest and straightforward."

"Yes, but who was the lady you were talking to—it seems to me that I have seen her before?"

"Ah, I see! My girl is just the least bit jealous. Isn't she a beauty? She is Miss Violet Lincoln, the belle of New York. Every one is going wild about her voice. She sings like a bird."

"What were you saying to her, Rufus? Are you acquainted with her, or were you asking money of her?"

"Yes, yes, doing a little begging! You know, my girl, it takes money to live in the city," and Rufus gave a coarse, disagreeable laugh. "Now, Kate, what are you doing here?"

Kate understood, although vaguely, that Rufus avoided a direct answer to her questions, and it annoyed her not a little, without her being able to define the reason.

"I am waiting maid to Mrs. Willett," she replied. "You seemed to like the city so much I thought I would come and try it myself," then her eyes filled with tears, and her red lips trembled with tender emotion. "You know, Rufus, it was so lonesome after you went away!"

"Well, well, Kate, that is all right! I am glad that you came. I would have been home long ago, but mother and I had a little business that was keeping us here. And you are with the young widow, Mrs. Willett? She is upper ten, Kate, and no mistake! You see I know them every one, although I have not a visiting acquaintance with them."

Rufus smiled ironically at the idea of his acquaintance with the fashionable society of New York, while Kate thought him good enough to mingle with the very best of them.

"I must go now, Rufus; Mrs. Willett always wants me at five o'clock," Kate said, her voice low and tender.

"Well, Kate, I am sorry to part with you so soon. When can you come and see mother?"

"Oh, almost any time, Rufus. Mrs. Willett is so kind to me, she lets me go out whenever I ask her," exclaimed the delighted girl.

"That's kind; say to-morrow evening, and I will walk home with you."

"Oh, Rufus, that will be so nice! I was almost afraid that you would be out of humor with me for coming to the city, but I did want to see you so badly."

The rose-color dyed cheek and brow of the young girl at her unguarded confession, but Rufus did not see anything but that which was lady-like and proper. His egotism declared it due him, and he accepted the love of the unsophisticated girl as a matter of course, simply to be tolerated, not returned.

Other eyes than Kate's had witnessed the meeting between Rufus Day and beautiful Violet Lincoln.

Mr. Lincoln had just come out from the studio of a friend as Violet met Rufus but a few feet from him, and full of surprise he watched them. Soon he became assured that this was not their first interview, and that they had met by appointment. Who was the bold, insolent man, and what was he to Violet? What was he demanding so insultingly, and why did Violet permit it? As they separated he turned homeward, his heart filled with sad forebodings. He was at a loss to know what to do or how to act. He had thought her so pure and proud, so far above the disreputable class, that he had not inquired into her early history as he might have done. But one fact was plain to him: it was her association with this man that was robbing her cheek of its rich bloom, and destroying the sparkle of her lovely eyes. With his quick power of penetration he had discovered at the first glance that which the unsuspicious girl had failed to detect in her several meetings with the man, and that was, that he wore a disguise, and a poorly arranged one, betraying him a novice in the business. Not knowing what better to do, Mr. Lincoln decided to refrain from questioning Violet for awhile and watch the man carefully.

After his return home, while he was seated in the library deep in thought concerning what he had seen, Violet came into the

room, her step slow and her sweet face sad, and wearily seated herself on an ottoman at his feet, and laying her head upon his knees, she burst into a passionate flood of tears, Mr. Lincoln stroking her dark hair tenderly, not trying to check her tears, for he knew full well that her pent-up grief could not find relief in a safer way. Soon the passion of her soul had spent itself, and raising her tear-stained face, she said:

"Uncle Robert, forgive me! If I had not come to you I would have died! Oh, if my mother had lived; but I have no one to go to but you!"

"What is it, Heart's-ease? I will help you—I will shield you even with my life," he answered slowly, greatly moved.

"Oh, Uncle Robert, I cannot tell you, but it is killing me!"

"What is killing you, Violet?"

"The secret, Uncle Robert, that is driving the life-blood from my heart—and I dare not tell you! You, with your proud, stainless name, would dislike me, even as you love me now. I would give the world, if it were mine, if I had never come into your life, if to come must be to deceive!"

"Violet, you have not sinned? There is no guilt in your girl-heart? Answer me, Heart's ease," and a swift shadow darkened his face.

Violet raised her clear, honest eyes to his, wondering that he could ask such a question.

"No, Uncle Robert. My life so far has been pure and true. You surely did not doubt my innocence?"

Mr. Lincoln gave one long, searching look into the lovely dark eyes before him, and then in spite of all he had seen, he believed himself unjust to the young girl—he had been suspicious beyond that which the trifling incident warranted.

"No, Violet, one glimpse of the soul shining through your truthful eyes would prove your innocence, even against the strongest circumstantial evidence. You may be burdened with the secret of another, but I believe your life to be open and entirely free from deception. If I did not, I would be miserable indeed. I hate and detest a lie—a living deceit! I could pardon anger, or even violence, but a cruel lie, never!"

Violet recoiled from him with a look of terror on her white face. She felt herself being encompassed about with all the power

of an unseen force, determined to work her destruction. What was her own life but a lie? Why had she never thought it wrong before? What would her kind old friend say, if she was to tell him that she had been a bride for three years—that she had met her husband almost daily for several weeks? What excuse could she present to him, for her actions, for willfully deceiving him? No, not willfully; she had had no definite purpose in keeping her marriage a secret, beyond that which concerned Carl and herself. And she had raised her eyes to his and declared that her life was pure and true, while he had plainly shown her that she was living a falsehood daily. Oh, how intricate her way was becoming, causing even the light of Heaven to grow dim around her footsteps! Somehow, the disgrace attending the acknowledgment of her father seemed to sink into insignificance, in comparison with her own life of deception.

"What is it, Violet?" questioned Mr. Lincoln. "You need not fear to confide in me."

Violet lifted a saddened, grieved face to his sight; her lips trembling, and her slender fingers clasping and unclasping themselves nervously.

"Not to-night, Uncle Robert. I could not endure it! Some other time and I will tell you all."

She shuddered as the word "all" passed her lips. Now it signified so much more than ever before. Then she wondered if Carl would not despise her for deceiving him. Why had she been so blind, so foolish?

"Well, Heart's-ease, any time will answer. I imagine, when the secret is confessed, its gigantic proportions will exist only in fancy, not in reality. Come, cheer up, Violet! I want to see you my own light-hearted girl again."

"You are very kind, Uncle Robert. Every sentence that you have spoken to me has soothed and rested me like a mother's lullaby song calms the torrent of her child's grief; and soon, very soon, I will tell you that which so much distresses me. Now, good-night; I am so glad that there is one who trusts me so completely."

As Violet rose to her feet, Mr. Lincoln pressed a kiss upon her fair brow, which fell like a solemn benediction upon her sorely troubled soul.

"Fear not, child! God will take care of my pure Violet," he said earnestly. "Only we must not grow impatient because little afflictions cluster around our path. He knoweth best. He will not permit us to be tried beyond that which we can withstand."

A smile of exquisite sweetness lit up Violet's downcast face as Mr. Lincoln's words of consolation found way to her soul. Yes, God would care for her! Then she thought how strange it was, that ever since Carl had so prophetically given utterance to the expression, that it had always come to her in every time of extreme need, and because of its soothing power it had become her talisman, her comforter, her salvation.

"Yes, Uncle Robert, we are all in the hands of God," she said, thoughtfully. "Fate is wavering and uncertain, but God is eternal. I like to remember that He is all-powerful and merciful."

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## CHAPTER XIII.—Earnest Treherne's Return.

One glorious spring morning as Carl was walking slowly down Broadway, he came face to face with one who was dearer than a brother to him.

"Hello, Earnest! Where did you drop from?" he said joyfully.

Earnest Treherne halted abruptly and grasped the extended hand of his friend.

"Just come ashore, Carl, twenty minutes ago! I am glad to meet you, my boy; but you are not looking well. Not been sick, have you?"

"No, Earnest, I am well, and am truly delighted to have you home again—but I forgot—England is your future home. Lucky boy that you are! But come with me to my rooms. I have something to tell you. I want my old friend's sympathy and advice. Oh, Earnie, I have missed you so much this winter!"

Earnest Treherne gazed with surprise into Carl's flushed, troubled face, and intuitively he perceived that it was mind torture, instead of bodily suffering, that had caused him to become so pale and thin. He remembered how impulsive and generous Carl was—and sometimes just a little wild—and he concluded at once that he had fallen into trouble in this way.

"Certainly, Carl, I will go with you for an hour or so," said Earnest.

They walked on together conversing about Earnest's trip over, English news, and New York gossip, until they had reached Carl's handsome rooms. After seating themselves Carl laid his hand upon Earnest's arm, and said:

"Earnest, you remember the ceremony, by the spring in the woodland, back of Weston?"

"Yes, Carl. It would be very strange if I did not," replied Earnest, a shadow of regret stealing over his countenance. "I did a very weak, foolish thing when I listened to your argument, and made the child your wife. It has been the one regret of my life."

"And mine also, Earnest; but it was not your fault. In the reckless mood I was in at that time, I would have married Dora Markley, even if I had been obliged to travel fifty miles for a minister. I was a desperate man, deaf to all reason or advice; but now, Earnie, I would give all I possess if you could undo your work—if I was a free man."

Carl bowed his head upon his friend's arm and groaned aloud.

"Carl, what is the trouble? Tell me all," Earnest questioned.

"There is very little to tell, Earnest. It can all be summed up in a few words," said Carl, lifting his head sadly. "I love the dearest, fairest girl in all the world, and she loves me, while chains stronger than the bands of steel have bound me to another. Oh, pity me, Earnie! To live thus is wearing my life away!"

"And Dora Leslie?"

"Hush, Earnest! That name puts a demon in my heart! She still lives at Weston, as Dora Markley, and I would welcome death before I will recognize her as my wife. I pay her one thousand dollars to forget that she is the wife of Carl Leslie, but I am in constant dread of detection. They are a low, degraded set, and one may expect almost anything at their hands."

Earnest dropped his head upon his hands a moment in deep, deep thought, and communed with his Heavenly Father.

"Carl, my boy, your case is beyond the help of any earthly friend," he said, looking up into Carl's face. "God alone can aid you. It is all and more than I have feared. And the lady, Carl, whom you love—does she know?"

"Yes, Earnest, I have confessed all, and in spite of everything she loves me," Carl said, proudly.

"But, Carl, is that well—is it strictly honorable? Remember that honor is the grandest attribute of man. It takes the precedence of all else in life. Dare you exchange love with another than your legitimate wife? Your sense of honor drew me to you in the strongest tie of brotherly love, Carl—for the sake of that love—for the sake of your own soul, do not tell me that you have dishonored your noble manhood and my trust!"

Earnest bowed his head again, his form quivering with anguish, his face pale with doubt, else he would have seen the proud lifting of Carl's head, the clear, truthful light in his dark eyes, welling up from a soul of honor.

"Earnest, look into my eyes, and tell me if you see anything suggestive of guilt, beyond that of deception? Violet Lincoln is as sacred to me as though she were my sister. I have never even kissed her perfect lips, but she is now, and will be until death, the life of my existence—the one love of my soul."

A glow of great joy overspread Earnest's face, as he raised his head and reached out his hand to Carl.

"Forgive me, Carl, for doubting. It was unworthy your friend. You have been true through every trial. God will not forsake, or leave you desolate. The most destructive storm-cloud must be followed by the bright sunshine. You have your honor and the future—life is not vain and empty. The promises of God are sure and steadfast."

"I wish I possessed your faith, Earnest, but I do not. All is bitter disappointment and torturing dismay. Nothing is tangible and true but the love of my darling! I would seek a divorce, but—,"

"No, Carl, never!" interrupted Earnest with deep feeling. "Remember 'what God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' Divorce is the work of Satan, and only culminates in ruin and disgrace to the participants. Shun it, Carl, as you would the foam-covered rocks wherein is death. But, I would like to hear more of the lady whom you love so devotedly. Who is she, and where did you meet her?"

Aye, who was Violet Lincoln? Carl asked himself the question, but he could not answer. He had never even thought who

she was before. He knew her name, and that she had been adopted by Mr. Lincoln. But who were her father and mother? It did not matter—he only cared that she was all the world to him—if she had been cradled in the arms of a queen she could not be more.

"Her name is Violet Lincoln, Earnest," he said. "She is an adopted daughter of Mr. Lincoln's. We crossed the Atlantic together, and as a natural consequence, I fell in love with her. Why, Earnest, every one who sees her, falls in love with her—they could not help it."

"Certainly not, Carl!" replied Earnest, laughingly. "Where is the lady who got you into all this trouble?"

"Louise Dupont! She married a wealthy old man by the name of Willett, and he died within a year, leaving her with a cool hundred thousand. She is very beautiful, but I never loved her. Earnest, it was only a fancy. The strangest idea of all is, that she and Violet are most intimate friends. I had imagined that I would dislike her for her conduct in the past, but I do not. My love for Violet has taken possession of every faculty of my being, and I have no inclination to entertain malice or hatred. You must see Violet, and then if you do not agree with me, I will acknowledge that I am just a little bit wild. Earnie, have you never been in love?"

"No, Carl! I am wedded to the ministry. I can work for the Master best as I am. No human love has ever filled my heart, save the love of mother and my friend Carl. I have no need of a sweet-heart—look at the trouble you are in because of your love."

Carl gave a little gesture of impatience, as he looked into his friend's smiling face.

"But, Earnest, you do not understand. I would bear twice the burden I now carry, before I would give up the love of Violet—all the world is as vapor in comparison with the assurance of her love."

"Well, Carl, I am glad that you value the price of your misery so high. I am well contented with my single state. Now I must not tarry longer. I must see mother. Had she known of my arrival, I would not have given you the first hour of my return home. I feel a trifle guilty as it is—but you looked so

badly that I had not the heart to deny you. Will you go with me, Carl?"

Carl smiled at what he deemed his friend's ignorance of the power of love, and together they passed out to the street.

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### CHAPTER XIV.—Rufus Confides in Kate.

Early in the evening Kate Carter hastened away to call on Mrs. Day and Rufus. She readily found their boarding place, and to her timid knock Mrs. Day threw open the door and bid her enter with quite a show of cordiality. "Hello, Kitten! Prompt as the sun rising," Rufus said pleasantly.

Kate's pretty face grew rosy, and a shy, glad light crept into her bright eyes, for when Rufus called her "Kitten" she knew that he was well pleased with her.

"I was so homesick to see some one from Weston that I did not wait a moment after Mrs. Willett gave me permission to go," she said, with the eagerness of a child. "You did not expect to see me here, did you, Mrs. Day?"

"No, Kate. It was quite a pleasant surprise. I never saw Rufus so delighted over anything in all my life."

Kate did not notice the vein of irony underlying Mrs. Day's words of flattery. She only understood that Rufus was glad because of her presence, and to the strangely infatuated girl this was more than life.

"Yes, indeed, Kate, I did want to see you," Rufus replied. "Mother, don't you think she knew me through my disguise. How is that for bright eyes?"

"Pretty good, my boy," said Mrs. Day. "I hardly knew you myself. But I'll venture, Kate, that you did not know the lady?"

"No, I did not, although I thought something about her familiar," exclaimed Kate eagerly. "Who is she, Mrs. Day? Is she some one I once knew?"

A hoarse, disagreeable laugh came from the lips of Rufus, and he rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"I should rather guess you did!" he said. "Who did she remind you of, Kate? Think a minute."

"Not Dora, oh, Rufus, not Dora Markley?" said Kate, her eyes growing large and dark with wonder. "That grand, beauti-

ful lady, little Dora? I see it must be so. And you, Rufus, what was you talking with her about, and dressed up like a poor old man?"

"The best joke, Kate, that you ever heard! Somehow she has struck a bonanza, and lives in a perfect palace. She always wanted to find her father, and mother thought it would be quite a lift to us if I would disguise myself and make her believe that I am that worthy personage, and in need of money. I have done so, and the plan works like a charm. She does not want me to expose our relationship to her aristocratic friends, and consequently she comes down beautifully with the needful. Her old father is very grateful, and all that sort of a thing."

Kate listened, her head bent, her hands clasped, and her whole expression betraying deep dejection.

"You used to think a great deal of Dora, Rufus. Are you sure that you do not now?" she said, tremblingly.

"Why, Kate, you seem to forget that she is married!" Rufus said in well-feigned astonishment.

"Why, of course she is—what was I thinking about!" Kate's pretty face cleared of its cloud as though washed by an April shower, and the shadows lifted themselves from her dark eyes. "And handsome Mr. Leslie is her husband! Oh, Rufus, if he only knew, our thousand dollars would do us very little good! He would imprison us all, wouldn't he?"

"I expect he would, Kate, but he is not going to find out. No danger of Dora telling it."

"Yes, but if Mr. Leslie hears her name? Don't you think he will find out in that way?"

"Not a bit of it! The beautiful young lady, the belle of New York, is known as Violet Lincoln. Dora Markley was too common for one of her style."

Rufus snapped his fingers pertly, his voice ringing with sarcasm.

"Violet Lincoln!" repeated Kate, thoughtfully. "What a pretty name. How strange, Rufus—it is just like a story, but I cannot even guess how it will end."

"It is not going to end so long as it pays well. I am laying up quite a little nest egg for us, Kate," and Rufus smiled down into Kate's face as he spoke.

"Oh, Rufus, you are so good! I will save all I can," Kate exclaimed, impulsively. "Mrs. Willett is so kind—she makes me so many presents, that I do not have to spend my wages."

"That is nice, Kate," said Mrs. Day, turning from the window, where she had very discreetly gone when Rufus and Kate began to talk. "And for your life do you not mention one word of what Rufus has told you. It would make no end of trouble for him if you should."

"Indeed, Mrs. Day, I will keep it as secret as the grave. No one would have thought of such a thing but you and Rufus."

Mrs. Day winced a trifle, although Kate intended to compliment them. She realized that the cruel deception which they were engaged in was anything but praise-worthy—on the contrary, it was low and contemptible, but desire for gain had blinded her to all thoughts of disgrace, and Rufus was a child after her own heart. They had discussed the subject thoroughly as to the propriety of confiding in Kate, concerning Dora, and had decided that as her suspicions were already aroused, and that it would be far better to make an ally of her, than to risk her finding out for herself, and probably betraying them. And with a little well arranged flattery, they had completely deceived the trusting girl who would have believed almost anything Rufus might tell her.

After awhile she rose to go, and when Rufus declared his intention of accompanying her home, her eyes glowed like stars, her face flushed with joy, and for a time she was in her Heaven of Love.

Mrs. Day sat lost in thought until Rufus returned, and as he entered the room, she raised her head and said:

"Well, Rufus, we have disposed of that little lump of innocence. I wish we could handle Dora as easily, but we shall have trouble with her yet, or I am mistakened."

"Mother, I think it is about time for Dora to make up her mind to cast her lot with her lonely old father, don't you?"

Rufus paced restlessly up and down the room as he spoke, his face flushed hotly and an eager expression in his eyes.

Mrs. Day looked up half startled at his question. She had not thought beyond securing money from the deceived girl. What did Rufus suggest in his strange language? Surely no harm to Dora, she would not allow that.

"Why, Rufus! What do you mean? I don't understand you," she said.

"Mother, I want Dora. She shall be mine. Every time I meet her my love grows stronger. I dare not trust her in the presence of Carl Leslie longer—something will expose our scheme, and she will be lost to me forever. What does it matter if with a few words she was made his bride? How do we know that it was the work of an ordained minister? Young men are palming off sham ceremonies every day, on tender, confiding girls. Anyhow, mother, I would marry her to day, and take all risks."

"Rufus, you are wild!" Mrs. Day said, excitedly. "Dora is surely married, and no mistake. Do you think Mr. Leslie would take all this trouble to hide his marriage if it was only a sham? I will not lend myself to any thing of this kind. It is all wrong."

"All right, mother," Rufus said stubbornly. "I think that I can do without your help. My mind is fully made up. Dora shall be mine. Why, I have grown so desperate that I would take the life of Leslie before she should be his. Remember, mother, this is no new thing with me. I have loved Dora ever since I carried her in my arms, a little babe, and every hour of my life that love has grown stronger and stronger, until it is the one desire of my life. I could as soon tear the heart from my breast and continue to exist, as I can live without Dora. Mother, help me once more, and we will go far away and live a better life. After the girl is mine she will think better of me. I would be her slave—do anything to please her—she could not return a love like mine with hate."

Jane Day could but pity her boy, although she acknowledged his wicked designs beyond all reason. All the anguish of his soul found expression in his pale face and passionate words. She knew that his affection for Dora was no child's play with him—it was life or death. What must she do? One thing in favor of Rufus was, his mother's worshipful love of him, and he watched with eager longing to see what her decision would be, knowing that when once given she would not retract.

For several minutes good and evil lay side by side in the balance of indecision, the voice of God whispering, "beware, in

that path lies death," while Satan argued, "for your boy's sake," and evil triumphed for the time.

"Rufus, it is all wrong, but if you are determined to have the girl, I might as well help you, for you would make a regular muss of the affair. How do you propose to get her into your possession? You know that she would not come willingly."

"Oh, mother, that is easy enough, now that I can depend upon you to assist me! I knew that you could not turn against your only boy, just when he needed you as never before. You see I have been telling Dora that there is a fortune in her voice, and that her old father ought to have the benefit of it. I think rather than I should tell Mr. Lincoln who she is, that she will conclude to become a professional singer, don't you? After she finds out who I am, and we are married, we will all move out west, turn over a new leaf, and begin to live right."

Rufus was not so dishonest in his intentions as his language might lead one to suppose. He did not think that what he was about to do was such a dreadful crime after all. Dora had not lived with Carl Leslie—had never even claimed his name. He did not know that Dora loved Carl, and that she knew she was his bride. He only realized that it was within his reach to make her his by consent or force, and he was determined to use his power.

"But, Rufus, what will you do with Kate?" questioned Mrs. Day anxiously. "It is a shame to fool the poor girl so! I never saw any one so completely deceived as she is, but if she knew all, she might give you some trouble yet."

"Oh, Kate is all right, mother! She hasn't got the spirit of a fly. I am actually disgusted with myself for even pretending to care anything for her. She is no more like Dora than the light of a candle is like the noon-day sun. Beautiful, glorious, Dora!"

"Well, all I have to say is, don't be too sure that Kate has no spirit," replied Mrs. Day, with a knowing shake of her head. "I have seen her eyes flash more than once, and if she has the least inkling of our little scheme, I rather think she would betray some interest in the matter."

"What is the trouble, mother? It isn't like you to be so fearful. We won't try that bridge until we reach it, anyhow. All

I want now is to secure Dora, then we will look to Kate—we can at all hazards keep her in the dark until the affair is settled. What is your plan, mother?"

Mrs. Day looked at Rufus a few moments in silence.

"I have not thought enough about it, my boy. Don't be too hasty; there is time enough," she said.

"Time enough, mother! That is all you know about it," he exclaimed, impatiently. "Every hour is full of danger to me—I am not safe so long as she meets Carl daily."

Rufus rose to his feet and taking his hat, left the room, while Mrs. Day gave herself up to thought, planning how best to entice the beautiful young girl into the hands of her son, never for a moment dwelling on the sin or the disgrace and sorrow in store for their victim, only blindly, recklessly indulging her propensity for scheming and intrigue.

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## CHAPTER XV.—Heartaches.

Violet spent a miserable morning following her conversation with Mr. Lincoln. Her whole soul was in a fever of excitement and commotion. One moment she thought herself ready to confess all her deceit and faults, in the next she would have suffered tortures before she would have borne the look of pitiful amazement and withering contempt which she believed would find expression on the face of her dear friend. Why had circumstances placed her in so trying a position? Carl might, because of his love, forgive her in time, but her kind benefactor, never. His standard of right and truth was too high for him to tolerate the least deception—nothing could convince him that it had been done for the best. She remembered hearing him say once, that his daughter's greatest fault had been deception; that he could have forgiven her all else if she had not deceived him. And now, God pity her, the adopted child of his old age, had for months been living a false life. Oh, why had God permitted her to do so wicked a thing? She recalled only the day before, when she had thought her life reproachful only because of her disreputable father, but now her own conduct seemed degrading and mortifying in the extreme. Come what might she could not confide in Mr. Lincoln now—she could not give up

his love and respect. After they had dined, as Violet was about to leave the pleasant dining room, Mr. Lincoln drew her arm in his with a look of yearning affection, and said:

"Come, Heart's-ease! I want a song. With Mrs. Willett, Leslie and a host of callers daily, I find it impossible to claim your society any more. I believe I must be growing childish, because it grieves more than I would care to confess. Do you know, Violet, that if anything should take you from me, I would be left desolate beyond expression? All the affection of my heart has been lavished upon my one pure Violet. Sometimes, in my absorbing love, I almost forget that you are not my child."

Violet turned and clasped both hands over his arm, and with all the cravings of her soul looking out from her dark eyes, she exclaimed:

"Oh, Uncle Robert, how much I wish that I was your own, own child! That your strong arms might shield me from everything unpleasant in this life; but it cannot be. Still I shall not leave you desolate. I would sacrifice my own life, before I would willingly bring one shadow to your brow, or grieve your true and noble heart. Let the cost be what it may, I shall not forget that your claim on me is the strongest one on earth; all else is but secondary. Now, come, you shall have this entire evening. I fear that I have been careless of your pleasure."

"Oh, you sly rogue! What a little flatterer!" said Mr. Lincoln, well pleased with Violet's earnest words. "If I can only keep young Leslie at arms' length, I shall fear no rival in your affections; but I have my doubts in the matter."

"Never fear, Uncle Robert, in that direction. Carl will make you no trouble," Violet said, thinking sadly of the closed gate between them, shutting her out from the joys of love's Eden, and crushing the delight from her young life.

Silently they passed through the hall, and into the parlor, each heart burdened with troublesome thoughts.

"What shall I sing first, Uncle Robert, ?" Violet said, seating herself at the piano.

"Anything, Heart's-ease! The song is of very little consequence—it is your glorious voice I want to hear."

Violet rewarded him for his compliment with a roguish smile, and a playful shake of her head, then began to sing some beau-

tiful old ballad. Her clear, sweet voice echoed and re-echoed through the room, filling it with unsurpassed richness and volume. She continued to sing until she noticed Mr. Lincoln's head droop upon his hands. Then a rare, bewitching smile came to her lips, as she thought that she had sang him to sleep, and springing from the piano she clasped his hands in hers, and gently drew them from his face. But the merry laugh bubbling from her lips died away in a sigh, and a grieved expression tendered every line and curve of her lovely face. Tears—hot, passionate tears—were coursing down his cheeks, and standing in his eyes, and she knew that he was thinking of his child—his Violet.

She fell upon her knees by his side, and bowed her head on the arm of his chair.

"Oh, Uncle Robert, I am so sorry that I have made you cry!"

"Do not grieve, Violet. It was not your fault, that I am making a baby of myself. Your last song was so familiar. My child sang it for me the last time I ever looked upon her face, and then, while I loved her so, she died away from home and father, and because of pride, the saddest, cruelest thing in all this world, I denied her my forgiveness. Do you wonder that the song broke the ice of an old man's hardened heart?"

"No, no, Uncle Robert! You are not hard-hearted! You shall not speak so ill of my best—my truest friend," and Violet lifted her tear-dimmed eyes to his face, in pleading tenderness.

At this moment Louise Willett was announced, and rising to her feet, Violet welcomed her with a cordiality tendered only to an intimate friend. Mr. Lincoln greeted her kindly, and after a few moments' conversation he left them alone.

"Louise, you noticed how deeply Uncle Robert was affected when you came in?" said Violet, as he passed from the room. "I was singing to him, and something in the song caused him to think of his daughter, who is dead. Oh, Louise, he is just the grandest and best old man in all the world!"

"Best *old* man, Violet!" replied Louise, archly. "I, too, think him grand and good, but Carl would not like to hear you assert even so much as that, I imagine."

An earnest, tender light came into Violet's eyes, and a sudden rosy blush to her face, as she drew Louise close to her side, and said:

"Louise, I want to ask you one question, and I fear to do so. I would not wound your feelings for a great deal, but I do so much desire to know if you ever loved Carl as I love him?"

Louise lifted her head with a smile of assurance on her lips, and bent and kissed the rose-bud mouth, so close her own, before answering her trembling, reluctant question.

"I am so glad that you have asked the question, Violet, because I have wanted so much to tell you about Carl and myself, and how near we came to being married. Although he is noble and true, yet I never loved him, Violet, as you love. He pleased my fancy, and his attentions flattered my vanity, and for a time I thought the feeling was love, and, strange to say, he imagined that I was his ideal woman, while I only possessed the power to claim his admiration. Why, if I had truly loved Carl, do you think I would have given him up for the wealth of an old man? No, I was only interested in him, and a life of complete affluence with Mr. Willett, proved more alluring and attractive, than simple riches with handsome Carl Leslie. I have never loved any one as you seem to love Carl. I have not yet met the one who could stir to its depths my passionate, willful heart. So far my life has only responded to surface agitation—to momentary affection. Now, are you satisfied, little, conscientious prude?"

Violet smiled a sad, little denying smile, and thought that she had proven herself any thing but conscientious.

"Yes, Louise, I am satisfied," she said. "My love for Carl was always shadowed by the thought that what was my gain was perhaps your loss. I was well-assured that if you ever loved him you must love him still. I do not believe that we ever love but once in our life time—truly, honestly, and without reserve—and let the emotion come early or late in life, it is forever—even unto the death. How sad for both, if you had married without love, Louise!"

"Yes, and how sad for you, Violet!" and the low, silvery laugh of Louise rang out clear as a bell, then a great seriousness shone from her dark eyes, as she continued: "Fate permitted us to drift along in ignorance of our true feelings until our Heavenly Father, whose eyes of love and mercy reach beyond the present, and sees results, lifted his arm of power, and

said: 'it is enough,' and we were saved from awakening to a loveless, indifferent married life. Carl thought me a heartless flirt and cruel as death at first—but he does not feel so now. And I love no one so much as Violet Lincoln."

"And, I love—"

"Mr. Leslie, Miss Violet," a servant most opportunely announced, and throwing open the door, he admitted Carl Leslie and his friend, Earnest Treherne.

Louise's beautiful face was convulsed with laughter at the appropriate manner in which Violet's expression was finished, while the rich crimson surged up to the soft waves on Violet's brow.

After the introductions were concluded, Violet cast more than one glance of interest toward the handsome, dignified gentleman who had made her the bride of Carl Leslie, and she wondered if it was possible that he would recognize in her the distressed child whom his friend had rescued from a life of sorrow and poverty. But soon she realized her safety—Earnest Treherne only vouchsafed her glances of respectful indifference, not even one gleam of acknowledgment of her identity.

The evening passed away in a very entertaining manner. Louise was forced to own the truth to herself, that never had she met so stately and handsome a man, and one so pleasing. Then, perhaps, because of her own rare brunette beauty, his blonde face pleased her fancy, and aroused a feeling of interest in her fastidious heart.

Earnest readily bowed in submission to his friend's judgment in regard to Violet's beauty, but he formed quite a different opinion concerning Louise Willett. He thought her the loveliest as well as the grandest type of woman, and wondered at the choice Carl had made, and before the evening was spent he began to think that perhaps Paul, the apostle, had not been the essence of manly wisdom after all—that it might have been possible for him to have been happier and more useful in the ministry had he taken to himself a helpmate.

## CHAPTER XVI.—"OVER THE LINE."

Kate, little guessing the manner in which her confiding love was to be betrayed, was comparatively happy and contented—she would have been entirely so, but for the condemning thought that to some extent she was proving treacherous to the motherless girl, Dora. Kate was not naturally depraved, and only her love for Rufus could have tempted her to consent to the wicked deception.

Her stay with Mrs. Willett had become very pleasant. She loved Louise because she was so kind, so gracious, so like a queen among women. But within the last few days she had grown strangely restless, and ill at ease, and had she sought to solve the reason of her disquietude, she would have made a miserable failure—as yet the feeling was undefinable.

She was obliged to pass by a church almost daily, that was located but a few doors from the residence of Mrs. Willett, in which revival services were being held, and the songs of praise or invitation that floated out to her ear had proven a wonderful power of conviction to her unawakened soul. Every breeze seemed ladened with words of accusation and reproach, and she could not cast aside their influence.

One evening as she was on her way home from Mrs. Day's, accompanied by Rufus, her steps lingered as they neared the house of God, and as they came opposite the door, some irresistable power prompted her to say:

"Rufus, you need not go any further with me, I think I will attend church this evening," then a sudden thought caused her to add, "Will you go with me?"

"No, I believe not, Kate. I will go on up town," he replied.

And well pleased to get away from the society of Kate, he turned away, leaving her standing reluctant—wavering, almost tempted to change her mind and go home. It was a struggle of thrilling importance between the tender, pleading invitation of the Holy Spirit and the seductive persuasion of satan. Some one opened the vestibule door, and like a voice from the throne of God, the words of earnest entreaty and supplication were wafted out to her convicted heart:

"Oh tender and sweet was the Master's voice,
As He lovingly called to me,
'Come over the line, it is only a step—
I am waiting, my child, for thee.'

'Over the line,' hear the sweet refrain,
Angels are chanting the heavenly strain:
'Over the line'—why should I remain,
With a step between me and Jesus?

But my sins are many, my faith is small,
Lo! the answer, came quick and clear;
'Thou needest not trust in thyself at all,
Step over the line, I am here.'"

Kate waited to hear no more, but hastened inside the church and seated herself back by the door, eager and almost breathless, until the last words of the beautiful hymn had ceased to thrill the silence of the sacred temple, then the commanding figure of a handsome young man stood before her, and his clear, distinct tones seemed to hold the vast congregation spell-bound, as he repeated his text, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Kate listened attentively to the impressive discourse, but only one thought, one precious promise, thrilled the responsive chords of her soul—though her sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow—all else were but helpful aids to the one grand result—even the salvation of her soul. And when the request was made for those who desired to seek the favor of the Lord, to come forward, she was among the first to respond to the call, and while she knelt at the altar of prayer, and lifted her wayward heart to a throne of pardoning Grace, it was the low, sympathetic voice of Earnest Treherne that bid her hope and trust, and it was his hand that led her step by step, until she stood "white as snow" in the presence of God.

As is always the case with an awakened soul, the first thought is to make restitution for wrong committed or permitted, and the beautiful face of Violet Lincoln presented itself full of tender reproach, and also the grave, handsome countenance of Carl Leslie, as she thought of all the cruel wrong that was being forced upon them. But what should she do? Who would advise her in the matter? She did not even know where Violet lived. A thought

suggested itself, which caused her to lift her eyes suddenly, and gaze long and earnestly into the face of Earnest Treherne. How noble and grand he seemed! He had placed her "hand in His wounded palm," why not trust him to help her again? The thought grew to be a determination with her, and when the congregation had been dismissed she stole timidly to his side, and lifting her pretty face to his, now glowing with the sunshine of God's redemption, she said:

"Could I see you alone a few moments, sir?"

Earnest recognized her as one of those who had received the blessing of pardon and peace, and thinking that she desired some spiritual instruction, he replied, kindly:

"Certainly, Miss, just step into the inquiry-room with me, and any thing I can do, I am at your service."

He led the way into an adjoining room where were several young converts in deep conversation with men and women of God, and taking her apart from them, he seated her, and said, encouragingly:

"Now, Miss, if you have any questions to ask? Your bright face tells me that Our Father has been very gracious to you, in as much as you are His child."

"Oh, yes, sir!" 'Though my sins were as scarlet, they are now white as snow,' but it is not of that I would speak. I believe you to be good and true, else I had not sought you. I have a secret that is bitterly wronging a fair young girl, and I must not keep it now—it would soil my garment of snow. Oh, sir, I want your help and advice in the matter!"

Earnest lifted his face, luminous with joy and confidence in the power of God.

"Thank God, Miss, that you are beginning right!" he said, fervently. "Many a soul has been lost after the pardon of the Master, because they have failed to 'hold fast that which they have,' through condemnation for some unconfessed secret. Do not fear to tell me all, as you would trust a brother, 'for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.'"

Kate let her eyes droop a moment in sudden shame. It seemed so hard to confess her sin and disgrace to this minister of God; but he had said, "no cross, no crown," and timidly, but firmly, she raised her sweet resolute face to his:

"Sir, I will not make my story longer than possible, but it may necessarily weary you," she said. Then, in answer to his reassuring smile, she continued: "Some time ago a young man met and married an acquaintance of mine, and immediately after the ceremony had been performed he went away, and upon the day following the young girl disappeared. After some time he returned to the home of his bride, not to claim her, but to buy her silence. I lived close by, and through the persuasions of one whom I loved, I acted the part of the missing bride. The young man did not detect the fraud, but paid a handsome sum to me, if I would make him no trouble. With the money I had received, the aunt and cousin of the young bride, came to the city, and after a time I followed them, and found that they had discovered the bride, who had been adopted by a rich old gentleman—but perhaps I tire you?"

Kate perceived the young man start and his face flush up hotly, and thought that she was wearying him.

"No, no, Miss! Your story has deeply interested me," he hastened to reply.

"The young lady had always believed her father living, and knowing this, the young cousin disguised himself as a wretched old man, and made her believe that he was her father. She was not well pleased with him, and she is even now paying him immense sums of money not to betray her relationship—and all the while he is nothing to her. Now, what ought I to do?"

"Confess the truth at once, Miss. Go to the young lady and confess the wrong you have done her, then see the young man and he will forgive you for deceiving him, I am sure," said Earnest, strangely moved by the girl's story.

"But, sir, I do not know where to find either of them," Kate replied, somewhat disheartened.

"Cannot you find out from your friend who deceived them?"

"No, indeed! He must not know that I have ever confessed our deception to you."

"I do not see just what you will do—but your duty is very plain. You say that the young lady moves in the best society—that she is rich?"

"Yes, sir, and she is one of the handsomest ladies I ever saw! I could ask Mrs. Willett, she might be acquainted with her."

"Mrs. Willett! Do you know her?" Earnest asked in amazement.

"I live with her, sir. I am her maid. She is the dearest lady in all the world; but, oh, I dislike so much to tell her how wicked I have been! I would rather any one else would know than Mrs. Willett."

Kate's pretty face grew pale, and her lips trembled like those of a grieved child. Earnest fully understood her reasons for disliking to confide in her mistress, and thought of a way out of the dilemma.

"What is the name of the young lady? I will seek her out for you," he said.

"Oh, if you only would! Kate exclaimed, gratefully. "Her name is Violet Lincoln."

"What!" cried Earnest, springing to his feet. "Did I hear you aright? Did you say, Violet Lincoln?"

"Yes, sir, Violet Lincoln, and the name of the gentleman is Carl Leslie."

Earnest's face lit up with a sudden great joy, and unconsciously he sank upon his knees, and lifted his voice in solemn prayer and thanksgiving.

Kate gazed in wonder and surprise upon the young man until he rose to his feet and turned toward her.

"Miss, you cannot understand all that this revelation is to me. Carl Leslie is the dearest friend I ever had. Oh, how mysterious are the ways of God! How little we know what weak instrument shall lead us into the light! Who would not trust a Father who is all powerful to save, even to the uttermost? Violet Lincoln is Mrs. Willett's most intimate friend. You must tell her all; never fear but she will forgive you. She is the proper one to enlighten Miss Lincoln. I will tell Carl. God bless you for your faith and trust! What is your name, Miss?"

"Kate Carter," she replied, her eyes sparkling with delight, because of the load of guilt that had been lifted from her soul. God had forgiven her, she thought, why not Mrs. Willett?

"Miss Carter, I have not language to thank you just now, for confiding in me," Earnest said thoughtfully. "It is all so strange. Even with my knowledge of the secret workings of God, before this Divine Providence I stand amazed."

"Do not thank me, sir. I would not have done so yesterday. It is the power of God!" said Kate, earnestly.

"Yes, Miss Carter. It is 'the power of God unto salvation.' But excuse me, I am detaining you longer than is necessary. It is growing late. I will see you again," said Earnest, extending his hand.

Kate placed her hand in his, her face radiant with a new expression, and every feature beautified with the glory of God's sunshine and presence.

"I too, had forgotten the hour," she said, her voice suave and low. "Good night, sir, and many thanks for your kindness to a stranger."

And Kate passed out from the house of God, her heart light, and her soul illumined with the glory of the Holy Spirit. She had passed "over the line."

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## CHAPTER XVII.—"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

Life continued much the same in the elegant home of Violet. Mr. Lincoln was kindness itself—continually watching for an opportunity to lavish some new favor upon her. Carl, the one love of her life, the affinity of her soul, came and went as pleased him. A longing, craving tenderness shone from Violet's deep, dark eyes, when he lingered by her side, and in his absence she was restless, uneasy, and full of freaks, dreading a cruel something, always expecting to be rudely deprived of every joy. As a certainty of an approaching evil grew upon her, she clung closer and still closer to her true friend Louise—no one could soothe and comfort her so much as the fair young widow. Mr. Vancouver and Edith were often with her, the child's quaint ways and pretty, womanly expressions often dimpled her face with smiles, when she otherwise would have been sad.

One day when Edith was with her, full of her fun and mischief, rambling over the large house with the freedom of a privileged fairy, she came upon the family portraits in Mr. Lincoln's private sitting room. Mr. Lincoln watched her flitting from side to side of this room, and listened awhile to her odd criticisms of his dignified ancestors, then climbing upon his knees she began to question him concerning them.

She admired the stately smiling face of his wife, but most of all she was pleased with that of his lovely daughter.

"Mr. Lincoln, where is your daughter now?" she asked.

"Child, she is in Heaven, I trust," he replied, gazing sadly upon the beautiful pictured face while he recalled all that she had been to him, when she was a child like Edith.

Edith's sweet face clouded, her sensative, sympathetic nature was ever quick to respond to the sadness or mirth of others, and she stroked his gray hair with tender touch.

"Then she is dead!" Oh, I am so sorry. How I would love to hear her talk, and see her eyes sparkle—you know that is what makes people handsome. When did she die?"

"A long time ago," Mr. Lincoln said, as though talking to himself, then seeming to recall his thoughts, he continued earnestly, "Edith, never deceive your father, no matter how great the temptation. One moment of deception may sadden many hearts for a lifetime. Always be true, and shun a secret as you would a deadly serpent. My beautiful child, how I loved and lost you!"

Edith's eyes grew large and dark, with wonder, and her little hands were clasped around Mr. Lincoln's neck, in loving compassion.

"Did your child tell you a bad, bad story, Mr. Lincoln? Is that what you mean?" she questioned.

"No, Edith, not that; but she did not tell me the truth—she did not confide in me. Perhaps if her mother had been spared to us, all would have been different. One moring we waited in vain for her bright, winsome face, and quick, dancing footsteps. It was the saddest hour of my life, child. She had left her home and father for the love of a stranger—and I had trusted her so completely, so fully."

"Oh, the naughty, naughty girl! To leave you and this beautiful home!" and sparks of indignation flashed from Edith's expressive eyes. "Did you go after her and bring her back?"

"No, Edith. This was not my home at that time, I lived on the bank of the Hudson, in a beautiful place called Rose Cottage. I did not go after her, she had made her choice. I would not even read her letters, but returned them unopened, and I never looked upon her face again. She died away from her home among strangers."

Edith loosened her arms from around his neck, and slipped down from his knee, a look of thrilling contempt flooding her child-face, and tears of sympathy for the poor girl who had died among strangers, welling up in her dark eyes.

"Mr. Lincoln, I don't like you one bit! I think you was as cruel and wicked as she was naughty! I do not see how you could treat your own, own child like that! Why, maybe she was sorry right away, after she had been naughty—I always am. I expect she wrote and told you all about it, and wanted to come home. Oh, I am so sorry that you did not think twice before you treated her so badly! Papa says I must always think twice and speak once."

Mr. Lincoln bowed his head in deep distress, never had anything so humbled and touched him as the rebuke of Edith—never had his conduct appeared so contemptible and inexcusable as now.

"Child, I also am sorry, but it is too late," he said, his voice choked with tears. "My pride—maddening, destroying pride—prompted me to deny her. I would give all I possess to find forgetfulness and forgiveness of the past."

"Well, if you are really sorry that alters the case," said Edith, drawing close to his side, her face beaming graciously. "I guess I will love you just the same after all, and I never will forget what you told me about being good and true. I don't feel near so angry with you as I did at first."

She turned from his knee and stood beneath the portrait, her hands clasped before her, and her sweet face full of tender pity for the beautiful girl who had left her home, and because of an unforgiving father, had died far away among strangers.

Mr. Lincoln wondered at his confiding mood. In all his life he had not spoken so freely to any one of his domestic troubles, as he had done to the pretty, winsome child. Then, as he remembered her words, he smiled unconsciously at her opinion of him so plainly expressed—and he liked her none the less for her candor.

His story had deeply impressed Edith. She was a child of wonderful imagination, and the recital of wrong and romance had taken strong hold upon her young heart, and her fancy pictured what might have been had Mr. Lincoln been less cruel and his child more confiding.

After tea, when her Papa had called for her, as he enjoyed doing, that he might have a chat with Violet, she began at once to tell him of Mr. Lincoln's beautiful child, and how some strange man had coaxed her away from her home, and concluded by begging him to go with her, and see how lovely her portrait was.

"Yes, Mr. Vancouver, you have never seen the face of my daughter. Come, Violet, we will all go with Edith," said Mr. Lincoln.

Mr. Vancouver tried to excuse himself, but courtesy demanded that he should accept his friend's invitation, and together they crossed the hall and entered the room where Edith had been so wonderfully impressed but a few hours before.

Mr. Vancouver lifted his eyes to the beautiful face so roguish and bright, and after gazing a moment in silence, he dropped his head into his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Forgive me, Mr. Lincoln! I cannot hide the truth longer!" he said desperately—passionately. "I was that man who won your child from you—but oh, I loved her so, my beautiful darling! I had thought never to betray myself, but the sight of her smiling face, so like that which I remember, has opened the floodgates of my soul; and by that face looking down upon us so kindly, I crave your pardon for the cruel wrong I did you in the past? It was an indiscretion of youth. I feared that you would say nay to my suit, and in a moment of doubt, I counseled an elopement, hoping that when we were married, you would forgive."

Mr. Lincoln stood like one stricked of life itself, while Mr. Vancouver confessed the folly and imprudence of his youth, the lines of his face growing *harder and more stern* every moment.

Violet's breath came in quick pants of incredulous wonder, and the question came like a flash, was Edith Mr. Lincoln's Grandchild?

Edith glanced from one to another in full appreciation of the whole affair. She accepted her father's confession as a proper sequel to Mr. Lincoln's disclosure, and thought it all just like a story. Then she noticed how dark and threatening Mr. Lincoln's face had become, and thinking that he did not look very much like forgiving any one, she stole to his side, and pulling him

down into a chair, she crept into his arms and laid her lovely face close to his.

"You will forgive Papa, won't you, Mr. Lincoln?" she questioned, in a low, tender voice. "You know that you said that you was sorry that you had not forgiven your child, and if you had, it would have meant Papa too. Now, do please, say, "Yes, I forgive you," then we will all be so happy. Only see, you are making Violet cry! I wouldn't grieve her for all the world. Besides, Papa is just as nice as he can be. If he was some old vagabond, there might be some sense in it. Come here, Papa!"

Violet shuddered at Edith's comparison, and her tears fell faster than before.

Mr. Vancouver came to the side of his capricious child, and Mr. Lincoln reached out his hand and grasped that of his son-in-law, while Edith lavished a wealth of kisses upon his tear-wet face.

"Oh, you are my Grand-pa?" she exchaimed at last, as the idea came to her with thrilling force.

Mr. Lincoln looked up eagerly. If the report of his child's death had been true it could not be so.

"No, Edith, Mr. Lincoln is not your Grandfather," Mr. Vancouver explained. You are my daughter by a second marriage. My first wife died ten years before you were born."

"Oh, pshaw, Papa! That spoils it all!" said the child, her voice quivering with disgust and disappointment. Let us pretend it isn't so Grand-pa! I never will believe one word of it. Papa thinks that maybe you would not like it if he should say I was your Grand-child, because I am not always good, but I know it is so. From this very minute I am going to call you my own dear Grand-pa—there now!"

Mr. Lincoln drew the pretty, willful child to his empty heart, with an almost savage embrace. Yes, he thought, she belonged to him and he would never give her up to anyone.

"Yes, darling, you are mine!" Your Papa robbed me of my sunshine, I shall take his, but I will share your love with him and Violet. Mr. Vancouver, I forgive you freely. I was more to blame because I hardened my heart against my own flesh and blood. Tell me of my child? Where she lived, and how she died?"

Violet took a low ottoman at Mr. Lincoln's feet, and Mr. Vancouver seated himself before them, where his eyes could constantly rest on the face of the bride of his youth—the only love of his life.

"Mr. Lincoln, your daughter and I were married the evening that she left her home, and we started at once on a trip to Europe. I have no excuse to offer for our private marriage, only that you always treated me with haughty indifference, and refused many times for your child to accompany me to places of amusement. I argued, that if you would deny me so trivial a request you would do worse if I were to ask her hand in marriage, and I could not give her up. She loved me even as I loved her, and it was not difficult to persuade her to be mine, without your consent. She always believed that you would forgive her upon our return, and when you would not see her, or even read her letters, it broke her heart.

"Now, Grand-pa, didn't I tell you so! Oh, oh, what ever made you do so?" and Edith buried her face on Mr. Lincoln's neck, and sobbed aloud.

"I was worse than a brute, Edith! Go on. Tell me all!" said Mr. Lincoln, huskily.

"Her health began to fail her," continued Mr. Vancouver, "and her physician advised me to take her to the country. I did so, and for a time she rallied. Then a little girl-baby came to gladden our hearts, and after that—although she loved it as her life—she was forced to die and leave it."

"And her child?" asked Mr. Lincoln, eagerly.

"I dared not bring it to you—I had no one to go to—and I left it with a kind woman, and went abroad. After my return to America, I went to look after her but she was not where I had left her. I think that she is dead."

"Of course she is!" said Edith, with a toss of her pretty head, not unfeelingly, but with a sense of relief that she would still hold the first place in the affections of Mr. Lincoln. "It is just as well, Grand-pa, she would have made you no end of trouble. Besides, if she died when she was a child, she is a great deal better off—nurse Mary says everybody is. Now it is all settled. I am going to come and live with you and Violet, and Papa, you can come and see me once in a while."

They all smiled at Edith's settlement of affairs, and thought what a sweet petted child she was, and not a little willful.

"You had better wait, Mischief, until you receive an invitation," said Mr. Vancouver, laughingly.

"She already has that," replied Mr. Lincoln, drawing the child close to his side. "What does my Heart's-ease say?"

Violet had been strangely silent during the conversation between Mr. Vancouver and Mr. Lincoln. Why must her life be so barren of delight? Why had she found in her father only a burden of shame and disgrace? She could not enter into their joy, her heart was too sore. And her smile was sadly sweet when she drew the child toward her and kissed her rose-bud mouth.

"Edith shall be my dear little sister. I could not do without her," she said.

"And I, Violet?" questioned Mr. Vancouver, as he bent down and laid his hand upon hers.

"My friend, always my dearest friend!" and the sorely tried girl burst into a passionate flood of tears.

Mr. Lincoln thought that he understood why she was so sad. It was because of the secret that was robbing her young life of its richness and bloom, and the happiness of other's had contrasted so vividly with her burdened heart, that she could not control herself longer.

He put Edith out of his lap, and drew Violet's beautiful head to his knee, while he stroked her glossy hair with a touch loving and tender as that of a mother.

"Don't grieve so bitterly, Violet!" he said. "You have a place in my heart sacred to you alone. I know how trying this re-union is to you—it makes your own condition more lonely. No father, mother, brother, or sister, only a poor old foolish man, who loves you far better than his life."

"Oh, Uncle Robert, forgive, oh, forgive me! I am not worthy your love!"

Violet dashed the tears from her eyes and lifted her flushed face to his.

He smiled down upon her, as he thought she referred to his forgiveness for her out-break of tears, when she ought to be happy, while Violet was thinking regretfully of her deception toward him.

Edith had crept into her Papa's arms, and was almost asleep, the day had been so full of excitement that it had left her completely exhausted.

Mr. Lincoln rang the bell, and in a moment a servant appeared, and he gave orders for a room to be lighted for Mr. Vancouver.

"You must not take the child out to-night," he said. "She is so tired and sleepy."

"No, indeed, Edith shall stay with me!" said Violet, bending over the lovely, flushed face.

Edith clasped her arms around Violet's neck, and drew her close to her Papa's side.

Mr. Vancouver gazed down upon the two beautiful faces with a feeling of tender love, and with a desire to clasp both to his heart. Somehow Violet seemed as dear to him as Edith. Then with a deep sigh he placed the child upon her feet, and permitted Violet to lead her away, leaving him alone with Mr. Lincoln.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.—A Mutual Understanding.

The afternoon following Kate Carter's startling disclosure to Earnest Treherne, he called upon Mrs. Willett, happy that he had so reasonable an excuse for presuming on his short acquaintance with her.

He found her even more charming than he had thought her when at Violet Lincoln's, and they conversed for some time very pleasantly, before touching upon the object of his call.

At last he could not fail but notice an eager questioning in Louise's eyes and a flush of excitement on her cheek, and he said:

"Mrs. Willett, your maid, Miss Carter, gave me quite a pleasant surprise last evening. She has told you, has she not?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Treherne! I have just been wild to talk with you about it, but I thought that you never would mention the affair," and Louise gave a merry, rougish laugh, in which Earnest joined her.

"I perceived that you were becoming wonderfully excited over something," replied Earnest archly. "Do you not think it the strangest story you ever heard?"

"I certainly do," replied Louise, eagerly. "I did not know that Carl was married, and little did I guess that Violet was a bride."

"And that I was the minister who performed the ceremony," added Earnest.

"You, Mr. Treherne!" exclaimed Louise, breathlessly. "Well, I am almost ready for anything in the way of the miraculous. And you did not recognize Violet?"

"Mrs. Willett, she was but a child of fifteen, when I made her the bride of Carl, and three years have wrought a wonderful change in her," replied Earnest, thoughtfully.

"Please tell me how it happened, Mr. Treherne?" asked Louise. "It must have been a strange wedding."

Earnest reflected a moment, not knowing just what to do. If he related the circumstances truthfully it might wound her feelings, and he could not prevaricate.

Louise understood that his reluctance in some way concerned herself, and she hastened to relieve his mind of any embarrassment the thought might cause him.

"Do not spare me, Mr. Treherne," she said blushingly. "I want you to relate all. I did not love Carl, and he only thought that he loved me. We were only good friends—If we had married we could not have been more to each other. Love cannot be called into existence by the simple word of command, nor can it be taken from the happy possessor by physical force. It is a gift made sacred by the sanction and blessing of God."

Earnest's handsome face flushed with a sudden glow of joy, and he could not refrain from a low, half-audible "Amen"—perhaps because the expression had become a habit with him.

"It may be, Mrs. Willett, that you do not know that I was to have performed the ceremony which would have made you the wife of Carl, and when you told him that it could not be, he requested me to go abroad with him. I had been studying hard, and the recreation he offered was gladly accepted. We were on our way when a wreck of cars detained us sometime at a little village called Weston. To while away the tedious waiting, we rambled out into the wood adjoining the village, and while there we came upon a child crying bitterly. We questioned her, and found that she was about to marry one whom she disliked with all her heart—that she was to be forced into the marriage by an aunt with whom she lived. Carl's heart was crushed and empty because of your rejection, and without a thought of the

result he offered to marry her himself, that she might be saved from the young man's persecutions. He knew that I had the marriage certificate with me that had been intended for you, and before I had hardly realized the wrong, he had persuaded me to unite them in matrimony. Then we continued on our way to Cape May, and from thence we sailed for Europe. That is all I know of the affair."

Louise listened attentively to the history of the rash marriage, then said:

"But where did he meet her afterwards, Mr. Treherne? and how did she become the adopted child of Mr. Lincoln?"

"Carl met her on the homeward-bound vessel in which he sailed, and fell in love with her. Beyond that I do not know."

"And he does not dream that Violet is his wife, and she does not know that Carl is her husband! What a strange, strange tangle."

"I am very sure that Carl is deceived," said Earnest, his eyes flooded with thought, "but I cannot understand the possibility of Miss Lincoln failing to recognize him. His name has not been changed, and he looks very much as he did three year's ago."

"Perhaps she does recognize him, Mr. Treherne, and on account of the vagrant, whom she believes to be her father, she is keeping her identity a secret from him."

"Ah, I had not thought of that, Mrs. Willett! I have no doubt your conclusion is the proper one. I had thought of everything else I believe. When will you explain the deception to Miss Lincoln?"

"Soon—to-morrow, I think. I was waiting to see you before going to her."

Earnest's heart thrilled at her words, because they betrayed an interest in him—she had expected him to call, and was not displeased.

"I have not seen Carl as yet. I called on him but he was not in," said Earnest, then he added, as though thinking aloud, "The conversion of Miss Carter will disentangle a thread of mystery and intrigue beyond anything we could guess at. You believe in the prompting and guiding of the Holy Spirit, do you not, Mrs. Willett?"

"I hardly know what I think, Mr. Treherne," replied Mrs. Willett, somewhat embarrassed at the pointed question. "I have not time to give such matters even a passing thought. You know I am not a Christian, but I am glad if Kate has been converted, and through a change of heart she has been pursuaded to confess a terrible wrong. I suppose some one must wear the laurels for it all, and I have no doubt but that God deserves the credit more than any other agency. Do you believe in a God who punishes one for every idle word and action regardless of their intentions—an omnipotent being?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Willett," and a shade of regret stole over the face of Earnest at the question. "It would grieve me very much if I believed you did not."

Louise gave him a quick bewildering glance from her dark eyes, then said softly:

"Then I shall not say what I believe, because I desire to please, not to grieve you."

Earnest's face flushed hotly again, at her glance and words, and he wondered how it was possible for Carl to love even the fairest girl on earth, after his intimacy with this glorious woman.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Willett, but I see so great perfection in your character, that it may be said of you, as it was spoken to one of old, 'one thing thou lackest'."

"And I might respond to your kindly expressed compliment, that 'almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,' Louise murmured in low, sweet tones, then throwing back her head as though casting aside unpleasant thoughts, she added lightly, "Oh, dear! Let us talk about something else—the thought of death and eternity always makes me shudder. What do you imagine Carl and Violet will say when they are enlightened in regard to their relationship?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Willett, I have no idea, but this much I do know, that it will be a happy time," said Earnest smiling, at her promptness in changing the subject.

"I would like so much to hear what Carl thinks—would it be asking too much, Mr. Treherne, for you to call and tell me? If you have other engagements do not hesitate to say so—I know that you are assisting with the services at Fifth Avenue Church," Louise said half-reluctantly.

"Thank you for your kind invitation, Mrs. Willett, I will surely come—I may see Carl yet to-day. Somehow, I feel a need of haste in the matter wholly unaccountable."

"And I too, will go to Violet this evening—something might transpire to prove to-morrow one day too late."

"I believe it to be best, Mrs. Willet; and it will be a pleasure to me to know that we are on similar errands of mercy at the same time. I shall think of you often this evening," and with a lingering good-by Earnest passed out from her presence, his heart a willing captive to the charm of her manner and the beauty of her face.

As the shades of evening drew near he sought the rooms of his friend, and this time he was more fortunate, Carl was at home and gave him a warm welcome.

"The very boy I wanted to see!" exclaimed Carl heartily. "How did you happen to appear in answer to my desire?"

"I did not 'happen,' Carl, I came with a purpose," Earnest replied. "I have something of vast importance to relate to you."

"Not fell in love with Louise already? Eh, Earnie!" and Carl laughed merrily at the evident embarrassment of his friend.

"It is not to make you a confident to that effect that I am here, Carl," replied Earnest, evasively "It is something of unbounded interest to yourself."

"What, Earnie! You know that I have no patience. Does it concern Violet or Dora?"

"Both, Carl!"

"Both! What do you mean?"

"Carl, Violet and Dora are one and the same. Do you understand?"

Carl sprang from his chair and grasped Earnest's arm until he could have almost cried out with pain.

"Earnie, for God sake, tell me what you mean? Violet is Dora, the girl I made my wife? It cannot be! You are surely mistaken."

"No, Carl, I am not mistaken. Listen and I will convince you also. Last evening after services at the church, a young girl who had just been converted, asked for a few moment's private conversation with me. She said that her name was Kate Carter, and that she lived at Weston. Then she confessed that to please

her lover, she had deceived you by personating Dora Markley, and that Dora had left home immediately after she was married and had never returned. Her lover had come to the city, and fearing treachery, she had followed him and found that he had recognized in Violet Lincoln, Dora Markley, your bride. Even now he is disguised as an old destitute man, and deceiving the confiding young lady until she believes him to be her father, and by this means extorting money from her."

"Earnest, Earnest! Shake me and see if I am awake, or only dreaming! If what you tell me is true, I shall be too happy for this world. Violet, my wife, and I did not know it!"

"But, Carl, Miss Lincoln surely knew you? Why has she kept silent?" asked Earnest.

"I do not know,—I care not! If she is mine all else will be explained. I know that she loves me, that is joy enough for the present. Excuse me, Earnie, but I must go to Violet at once. I cannot wait a moment longer."

"I sympathize with you, Carl, and do not blame you for your boyish eagerness. Do not let me detain you. I will see you in the morning. Shall you ride or walk?"

"Walk, Earnest! I could not wait for a carriage," said Carl, walking restlessly up and down the room.

"Then I will accompany you a short distance."

Earnest expecting Louise to call on Violet during the evening, had decided to attend church, and together they passed out to the street.

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## CHAPTER XIX.—Carl and Earnest to the Rescue.

The two young men had walked quite a little distance, and Earnest was about to part company with his friend, when Carl grasped his arm and said:

"Earnest, is not that Violet talking with that old man? Yes, I cannot be mistaken. See, she is about to enter the carriage. Earnest, what does it mean?"

Earnest gave one searching glance in the direction indicated by Carl, and comprehended to some extent, that she was to be more deeply deceived, and perhaps, cruelly wronged.

"She must not go with him!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Quick, Carl, come with me!"

The wicked plan of Rufus Day had worked like a charm. He had tortured Violet with his threatenings until completely worn out, she had consented to leave Mr. Lincoln and go with him. It may have been, that after her old friend had found in Mr. Vancouver a son-in-law, that she had reasoned that she was only in the way—that Edith would fill her place in his heart and home, and surely the child had by far the best right. Be that as it might, Rufus was exultant because success seemed so near.

He had handed Violet into the carriage, and halted a moment to give the driver some directions, when he was roughly grasped by each arm, and turned to find himself in close quarters, with the flushed, angry face of Carl Leslie looking into his.

"Rascal! What would you do with Miss Lincoln? Rufus Day, I know you! Your whole villainous plot is detected. Begone, dog, or I will hand you over to the police!"

Carl and Earnest released their hold upon his arms, and defeated and crest-fallen, Rufus hasted away.

"Come, Violet!" Carl said turning toward the carriage, "That man is not your father—he is Rufus Day."

But Violet did not answer, and Carl sprang into the carriage.

"Earnest, to the driver's seat, quick!" he said, his voice husky with emotion. "See that he drives to Mr. Lincoln's without a moment's delay. Violet has fainted!"

As the carriage started Carl clasped Violet in his arms and showered passionate kisses upon lips, cheek and brow, calling her by every endearing name found in a lover's vocabulary.

They had but a short distance to go, and in a very few moments the carriage drew up before the residence of Mr. Lincoln. Together Carl and Earnest carried Violet into the house, and gave her into the care of Mrs. Burnett. Soon the sweet face began to tinge with color, and the bewildered girl opened her eyes, and looked up eagerly into Carl's face, bending so near her own.

"Violet, darling! You are better?" he said, his voice agitated and trembling with doubt.

"Yes, Carl—what happened? How came I here? And oh—!" she covered her face with her hands, while her form quivered with emotion.

"Do not think about it, Violet! It was all false. No one in all this world shall claim you! You are mine,—all mine!" Carl said tenderly.

"Violet, child! What is the matter?" said Mr. Lincoln as he entered the room.

"Nothing, Uncle Robert. I think I must have fainted. See I am myself again."

And Violet sat up and drew him down by her side.

"Mr. Lincoln, allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Treherne, and to explain so far as possible, what no doubt seems very mysterious to you," said Carl.

Mr. Lincoln acknowledged the introduction gracefully, then turned toward Carl.

"I am listening, Carl!" he said, "Go on!"

At this moment the door was thrown open, admitting Mr. Vancouver, Edith and Louise.

Edith ran straight into Mr. Lincoln's arms, regardless of those around, crying:

"Grandpa, I was naughty, and wouldn't stay at home! and I tormented Papa until he was glad to bring me back. Now I am never, never going to leave you again! Do you hear that, Papa?"

They all joined in a merry laugh at the earnestness of the child, and when Mr. Vancouver could be heard he said:

"It is true, Mr. Lincoln! When I sought to convince her that she could not live with you, she developed into a perfect little tragedy queen, and I was forced to bring her to you for the sake of peace."

"That is so, Grandpa!" and Edith nodded her head in gracious confirmation of her Papa's explanation.

"Right, darling! You shall stay with me," said Mr. Lincoln, kissing her fair brow, "Send her wardrobe and dolls to-morrow, Mr. Vancouver, and she shall have a room fitted up for her exclusive use."

"I was not naughty, too, Mr. Lincoln, to make it necessary for Mr. Vancouver to escort me here," said Louise, laughingly. "I met them at the door—that is the reason we all came in together."

"I am not so sure, Louise!" exclaimed Violet.

Then a moment of embarrassment followed. Carl did not like to speak before Mr. Vancouver, and Mr. Lincoln felt a delicacy

about insisting, as he did not know the nature of his disclosure, but after a moment's thought he said:

"Carl, perhaps it would be best for me to offer a little explation before you go on with your story. You heard this darling little mischief call me Grandpa, and in some respect she has that right. Mr. Vancouver is my son-in-law—the husband of my only child. I did not know the truth until last evening. The marriage was private, and I did not even know the name of my daughter's husband. I was most to blame, because I was proud and unforgiving. Edith is not my daughter's child, but the child of a second marriage. It is not necessary to go into detail, but all is forgiven, and I trust that my child in Heaven looks down with gladness. Now, Carl, do not hesitate to proceed with your explanation."

For some little time it would have been impossible for Carl to have attempted to explain—all was surprise and excitement. Questions were asked, congratulations tendered, and every one well-pleased.

"Mr. Lincoln, I imagine that my explanation will be equally as surprising as yours, and I trust will be as pleasantly received," said Carl. "There is no such a young lady as Miss Violet Lincoln, but instead, I will present Mrs. Violet Leslie, my darling wife!"

"Oh, Carl! How did you find out? How could you be so indiscreet!" cried Violet, as she hid her flushed face on Mr. Lincoln's shoulder.

"Is this so, Violet?" asked Mr. Lincoln, his voice low and trembling.

Violet lifted her head and placed both her arms around Mr. Lincoln's neck,

"Yes, Uncle Robert," she murmured, every word pleading his pardon. "Forgive, oh, forgive me! I did not realize how wicked it was to deceive you, until only a few days ago. But it all happened, Uncle Robert, before I met you—if it had not, I am sure I would have told you."

"Never fear, Violet, Grandpa will forgive you—he don't look the least bit like he did before he forgave Papa," and Edith peeped archly around into Mr. Lincoln's face.

"You need not feel neglected or insulted, Mr. Lincoln," said Carl. "She did not even tell me. I have met her day after

day, without so much as guessing that she was my wife. Oh, Violet, why did you keep this from me?"

Violet turned her love-lit eyes to Carl's reproachful face and wondered if he would still regret her silence, when she had confessed all.

"Carl," she said tenderly, "When we met on board the Comet, I knew you at once, and I thought if I could win your love I would explain who I was. Then afterward when I saw Louise and heard that you had been engaged to marry her, I thought perhaps you would love her again, and I waited—if it had been so, I would have kept my secret forever. After I found that Louise did not love you, and you were true to the vows made on the vessel, another obstacle to the confession presented itself. My father found me out, and I could not expect you to accept the child of such a degraded creature for your wife. Oh, Carl, do not despise me! Through it all I loved you, until my heart is almost broken!"

Carl, entirely heedless of those around him, clasped his beautiful wife close to his joyful heart, and received the first kiss from her lips since she gave him the caress by the spring.

"What in the name of common sense does this mean? Husband and wife, and not recognize each other!" exclaimed Mr. Lincoln.

"Mr. Lincoln, I think I can enlighten you," said Earnest. "The wedding was one of impulse, not common sense. They had never met before, and the bride was but fifteen years of age. Carl married her to save her from a union with one she very much disliked, and immediately left her. They did not meet again for three years, and by that time, Mrs. Leslie was so much changed that Carl did not dream she was his wayside bride."

"There is a link in the chain that I think none can supply but myself, said Violet, lifting her head from Carl's shoulder. After I had been made the wife of Carl, I found out that those with whom I lived had no claim whatever upon me, and when they tried to force me to give up my marriage certificate, and forget it had ever been, I fled in the night and took the train for this city. On the train I met Edith and her Grandmother en route for England, and as the child's maid would not leave America, they offered me the position of companion to

Edith, which I gladly accepted. The vessel on which we sailed caught fire in mid-ocean, and in the hurry and dismay, I was separated from Mrs. Lynne and Edith. Then Mr. Lincoln, the dearest friend a poor girl ever found, took pity on me because I was friendless, penniless, and alone, and placed me in school across the water, where I remained for three years. Then, as the last crowning favor, so unstintedly lavished upon me, he adopted me, and gave me his name, and shared his wealth with me. I was perfectly happy until my father found and claimed me—"

"Violet, why do you still say father?" interrupted Carl, forgetting that he had not explained that part of the affair. "The villain is not your father. He was Rufus Day disguised as an old man."

Violet sprang to her feet, every feature illuminated with indiscribable joy, her hands clasped in exultation.

"Oh, Carl, Uncle Robert, can it be so!" she exclaimed. "Thank God that I am not the child of such a wretch! And he was taking me to his home, he said. Oh, Carl, what would have become of me if you had not interfered?"

"I do not know—I dare not think—but I shall follow him to Weston—"

"Where, Mr. Leslie?" interrupted Mr. Vancouver, breathlessly.

"To Weston, a little town some thirty miles from the city. Rufus Day and his mother are two of the worst cases unhung." Carl explained, his hands clenched and his eyes flashed argrily.

Mr. Vancouver sprang to the side of Violet, and grasped her arm almost rudely in his agitation.

"Great heavens! What strange fancies fill my brain! Violet, tell me the name of your father and mother?" he cried.

"Mr. Vancouver, I do not know beyond that of "Raymond" and "Violet." I have their letters, and mother's are postmarked 'Rose Cottage,' and my father's 'Oxford, England'."

Mr. Lincoln sprang to his feet, and Mr. Vancouver caught the bewildered girl in his arms, while his manly form quivered with a great joy.

"Violet, you are my daughter—the child of Violet Lincoln. God be praised for this moment of blessing! Did you not know that my name was Raymond? Your name while with Mrs. Day was Dora Markley?"

"Oh, yes, yes! I feel—I know—it must be so! Father, and my own dear Grandfather! Carl, is this not joy enough to fill a lifetime?"

"My darling Heart's-ease!" said Mr. Lincoln, tenderly, taking her in his arms. "It is true, my heart claimed you long before my mind was enlightened. Human instinct is the best guide after all. Surely I have lived to see the perfection of earthly happiness!"

Edith had looked and listened completely bewildered and somewhat distressed at the turn of affairs.

"Papa Vancouver, look at me one minute!" she exclaimed indignantly. "If Violet is your child, then who am I? And she claims my Grandpa too. Violet, I always did love you but I cannot stand everything!"

"Oh, you little darling! You are my own sweet sister!" cried Violet, catching the child up in her arms. "It is your Papa and mine—your Grandpa and mine! Don't you understand, Edith?"

"Well, why didn't you say so a long time ago, before I felt so badly. I was just ready to cry, because I thought that I did not belong to anyone!"

"Carl, remember, the ceremony by the spring must be repeated, before you can claim your bride," said Mr. Lincoln. "There were no guests, no wedding ring, and no cake."

"And no brides-maid," said Louise, laughingly.

"I will agree to anything so that I can claim my darling soon," replied Carl.

"And I shall be glad to officiate under more favorable circumstances than those I so well remember," said Earnest.

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## CHAPTER XX—"ROSE COTTAGE,"

The pure snowdrops and star-eyed daisies were just peeping their modest heads from their winter covering, and one bright, particular spring morning all was hurry and happy commotion at Rose Cottage, the beautiful summer resort of Mr. Lincoln, on the bank of the Hudson.

It was Violet's second wedding day.

The happy girl had expressed a desire to be married at Rose Cottage, and although it was too early in the season to change

for the summer, the house had been made ready for the important event.

Violet was, with Mr. Lincoln, spending a few moments before she began to make ready for the marriage ceremony, and Louise had stolen away into the deserted parlor, and was standing by a window sheltered by the heavy folds of rich lace, looking out carelessly, but thinking deeply of her own life.

"Louise!"

A tender, manly voice, thrilling with passionate emotion, broke in on her revery, causing the rich crimson to surge over cheek and brow, and the dark eyes to light up suddenly, then droop in sweet confusion to the floor.

Earnest Treherne caught the gleam in her eyes, and somewhat encouraged, he continued:

"Louise, I have something to say that I almost fear will displease you, but I cannot live in doubt longer. Need I tell you that I love you with all the power of matured manhood—that no other love has ever filled my heart? Louise, pardon me, if I have presumed too much upon your kindness and favor—if I have been deceived and encouraged because of your graciousness?"

Louise turned and lifted her dark expressive eyes to his face, then with modest hesitation, but truthful candor, she laid her jeweled hand in his.

"Louise, you do not chide me! You will crown my life with the richest of earth's blessings?" said Earnest, his face shining with rapture beyond expression.

"Earnest, the love of my life has come to me at last!" Louise murmured. "God has kindly led me through temptations, and in paths I knew not of, from the bondage of fancy, to enjoy the glorious freedom of love."

Earnest bent his head and kissed the fair uplifted face, and with that caress he claimed her all his own.

"Then at last, my willful Louise acknowledges that she believes in Omnipotence—that she has been led by the power of the Holy Spirit!" said Earnest, half-laughingly, half-seriously. "Will you come to me, darling, when the June roses blossom?"

"If it is your desire, Earnest," Louise replied with a rosy blush.

At this moment a servant requested Louise to come and assist Violet, and Earnest was left alone with his great joy.

Edith, the winsome little fairy, had been absent from the side of Violet for quite a while, and when she returned she carried a bouquet of violets, and gave them to the bride.

Out on the bank, sloping to the water's edge, the violets grew wild and luxuriant, while nearer the house they were cultivated into the dark, velvety pansy, but Edith liked the wayside violet best. There was something about its shy beauty which to her sensitive imagination seemed strangely similar to her beautiful sister Violet.

"I found them hiding away in the grass on the bank, Violet," the child said eagerly, "and they looked so modest and sweet, just the color of your eyes, that I gathered them for you. I was most sure that you would like them better than those roses that grew in the house. Why, these smell for all the world like the deep, dark woods."

"Thank you, little sister, they are very beautiful, and I admire them much more than the roses," said Violet, and handing them to Louise she requested her to place a cluster in the lace on her bosom, and in her dark hair.

Edith watched Louise while she adjusted Violet's veil, then flew from the room, and in a moment her clear ringing voice was heard calling down the stairs:

"Carl, come here! Violet says that you may come up and see how beautiful she is—well, no, she did not say that, but I know she is just dying for you to see her—and I say she is the most beautiful sight you ever looked upon."

Carl sprang up the stairway and catching the tiny form up in his arms, kissed her happy, smiling face, then placing her upon his shoulder, entered the presence of his lovely, blushing bride.

He gave one glance of awe and wonder, then quietly placed Edith upon her feet—it was a moment too precious, too sacred, for the least levity. Could this rare vision of loveliness be the poor little girl whom he had met by the spring? We could not wonder at the thought. The shy, sweet wayside violet, through tender care and cultivation, though still retaining its woodland fragrance, had blossomed into the richness and beauty of the

pansy, and never in all her life had the fair young girl appeared so regally beautiful.

Her dress was of creamy lace over pale blue satin. Necklace and bracelets of elegant diamonds, the gift of Mr. Lincoln, graced her snowy neck, and fair, rounded arms. Over all was a long, floating veil of gossamar richness, confined by a circlet of matchless diamonds, and through its soft folds gleamed Edith's dark blue violets—a suitable tribute to her exquisite toilet.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" burst from Carl's lips. "My own sweet Violet!"

It was fortunate that Louise was near by, and determined to protect the beautiful dress, else Carl would have clasped the happy girl close to his heart, utterly indifferent to the destroying effect. As it was, he was laughingly dismissed from the room, until he should be summoned to take charge of his own, until death.

He had not long to wait, and tenderly, but, oh, so proudly, he led his lovely bride into the presence of their many friends. Louise, with an intimate friend of Carl's, assisted as bride's-maid and bride's-man, and once more, although under far more favorable circumstances, the clear, thrilling voice of Earnest gave utterance to the beautiful and impressive marriage ceremony.

After awhile, when Violet had changed her elegant bridal robe for a dainty, delicate traveling suit, Mr Lincoln clasped her close in a yearning regretful embrace, realizing that she would never belong to him again, as of old, and it was so hard for him to give her up.

"Heart's-ease, do you know that the light of my life goes with you? But my desolation is your complete happiness—that one thought cheers my old heart through the parting. May the richest blessing of God attend my own pure Violet."

Edith had stood listening to the words of Mr. Lincoln, and now as he ceased speaking, she exclaimed:

"Grandpa, just look at me! What do you mean by the light going out of your life? I guess I am going to stay. Don't you think I am any body? then the dainty head drooped, and great tears fell upon her clasped hands. "I love you so much, Grandpa —and I thought that you loved me. Have I been naughty?"

"No, my precious darling! You are the joy of my heart," and Mr. Lincoln gathered the grieved child into his arms. "No one could be desolate while they possessed this winsome fairy. Yes, little Edith, I love you even as you love me. God has been very kind, inasmuch as he has not left me comfortless."

Edith smiled her tears away, her heart fully satisfied with Mr. Lincoln's expression.

Louise flitted here and there like a ray of sunshine, and at the last moment, under cover of arranging Violet's veil, she whispered in low, faltering tones, her little love secret.

Violet kissed her, then said, roguishly:

"I am so glad, Louise! I knew that it would be so from the first. Carl will be so delighted."

Carl and Violet spent the remaining weeks of spring in the sunny South, then returned and took possession of their elegant home on Fifth Avenue, the gift of Mr. Vancouver.

Edith and her father lived with Mr. Lincoln, the old man would have it so—he could not give up his lovely, wilful darling—and as his life drew calmly, peacefully to a close, he realized that "his last days had been his best."

Rufus Day and his mother, immediately after their overwhelming defeat, had sold their property in Weston, and had gone far away, and no one seemed to care for their future. Carl was too happy to even think of revenge, and reverently he reasoned, that although the path had been rough, the landmarks dim, yet the hand of God had led them out of the wilderness into the Canaan of their delight and peace.

Pretty misguided Kate outlived the momentary pain occasioned by the knowledge of the treachery of Rufus, and was perfectly happy with Mrs. Willett, so happy that she had promised to accompany her kind mistress across the Atlantic, to her home in England when the June roses were in blossom.

And now, thankful for the peace and joy that has so abundantly blessed the lives of all, we leave them, acknowledging the truth of Carl's words, when he said, "God will care for you," and fully realizing, that when our WAYSIDE VIOLET shall be transplanted, through the law of Nature, it will be to richly blossom in the Eden of God's dominion.

THE END.

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